The Chums of Scranton High on the Cinder Path

Merwin Burman
From
Edward Burman
1929.

He encouraged Claude to show his grit.

THE CHUMS OF SCRANTON HIGH

On the Cinder Path

BY

DONALD FERGUSON

THE SAALFIELD PUBLISHING CO.

AKRON, OHIO NEW YORK

MADE IN U. S. A.

COPYRIGHT 1919

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Five Nut Foragers	7
II.	On the Old Quarry Road	15
III.	Talking of Ghosts	24
IV.	In Training for the Great Tournament	33
V.	Treachery in the Air	42
VI.	The Prowler	51
VII.	Caught in the Act	60
VIII.	Leon Promises to Reform	69
IX.	Scranton in Gala Attire	78
X.	When Muscles Counted	87
XI.	The Crisis in Claude's Life	96
XII.	Startling News from the Juggins Boy	105
XIII.	To the Rescue of "K. K."	114
XIV.	The Searching Party	123
XV.	Prowling Around the Quarry	132
XVI.	A Friendly "Ghost"	141
XVII.	Scranton's "Open House" Day	150
XVIII.	The Great Marathon Race	159
XIX.	On the Final Mile of the Course	168
XX.	The Boy Who Won—Conclusion	177

THE CHUMS OF SCRANTON HIGH

CHAPTER I

THE FIVE NUT FORAGERS

The bright October sun was half-way down the western sky one Saturday afternoon. Two-thirds of the Fall month had already gone, and the air was becoming fairly crisp in the early mornings.

All around the forest trees were painted various shades of bright scarlet, burnt umber brown and vivid gold by the practiced fingers of that master artist, the Frost-King. Flocks of robins and blackbirds were gathering rather late this year, preparatory to taking their annual pilgrimage to the warm Southland. They flew overhead at times in vast numbers, making a tremendous chatter.

A noisy bunch of crows cawed unceasingly amidst the treetops as a large, lumbering old automobile passed along the country road, the same filled with lively boys, and also a number of sacks stuffed to their utmost capacity with what appeared to be black walnuts, shell-bark hickories, butternuts, and even splendid large chestnuts. Apparently, the strange and deadly blight that was attacking the chestnut groves all through the

East had not yet appeared in the highly favored region around the town of Scranton, in which place the boys in question lived, and attended the famous high school where Dr. Carmack, also supervisor of the entire county schools, held forth.

The five tired lads who formed this nutting party we have met before in the pages of previous stories in this series; so that to those who have been fortunate enough to possess such books they need no lengthy introduction.

First, there was Hugh Morgan, looking as genial and determined as ever, and just as frequently consulted by his comrades, because his opinion always carried considerable weight. Then came his most intimate chum, Thad Stevens, who had played the position of backstop so successfully during the summer just passed, and helped to win the pennant for Scranton against the other two high schools of the country, situated in the towns of Allendale and Belleville.

Besides these two, there was included in the party a tall chap who seemed to be acting as chauffeur, from which it might be judged that he had supplied the means for taking this nutting trip far afield; his name was Kenneth Kinkaid, but among his friends he answered to the shorter appellation of "K. K." Then came a fourth boy of shorter build, and more sturdy physique, Julius Hobson by name; and last, but far from least, Horatio Juggins, a rather comical fellow who often assumed a dramatic attitude, and quoted excerpts

from some school declamation, his favorite, of course, being "Horatio at the Bridge."

It was "K. K." who got up the annual foraging expedition on this particular year, and promised that they should go in style in the antiquated seven-passenger car belonging to his father, who was a commercial traveler, which car "K. K." often used, when he could raise the cash to provide sufficient gasolene at twenty-five cents per gallon. But on this momentous occasion each fellow had chipped in his share pro rata; so that the generous provider of the big, open car was not compelled to beg or borrow in order to properly equip the expedition.

For ten days and more previously some of the boys had industriously interviewed the farmers who stood in the market-place during the early mornings, selling the products of their acres. Doubtless numerous good mothers wondered what caused such an early exodus from warm beds those days, since farmers had a habit of getting rid of their produce at dawn, and driving off home while most schoolboys were indulging in their last nap.

But, by various means, they had learned just where the nuts grew most plentifully that season; and quite a list of available places had been tabulated: to the Guernsey Woods for blacks; plenty of shagbarks, and some shellbarks to be gathered over at the old Morton Place, where no one had lived these seven years now; and they said the chestnuts away up in that region miles beyond the

mill-pond was bearing a record crop this season, as if to make amends for lean years a-plenty.

Scranton was one of the few places where the boys still yearned after a goodly supply of freshly gathered nuts to carry them through a long and severe winter. Somehow they vied with one another in the gathering of the harvest of the woods, and often these outings yielded considerable sport, besides being profitable to the nutters. On one momentous occasion the boys had even discovered the hive of a colony of wild bees, cut the tree down, fought the enraged denizens by means of smoke and fire, and eventually carried home a wonderful stock of dearly earned honey that would make the buckwheat cakes taste all the sweeter that winter because of the multitude of swellings it cost the proud possessors.

Hugh had been coaxed to join the party; not that he did not fully enjoy such enterprises, but he had laid out another programme for that afternoon. All through the morning these same lads had been hard at work on the open field where Scranton played her baseball games, and had such other gatherings as high-school fellows are addicted. Here a fine new cinder path had been laid around the grounds, forming an oval that measured just an eighth of a mile, to a fraction.

All through the livelong day on Saturdays, and in the afternoons during weekdays, boys in strange-looking running costumes of various designs could be seen diligently practicing at all

manner of stunts, from sprinting, leaping hurdles, engaging in the high jump, with the aid of poles; throwing the hammer; and, in fact, every conceivable exercise that would be apt to come under the head of a genuine athletic tournament.

For, to tell the secret without any evasion, that was just what Scranton designed to have inside of another week—a monster affair that included entries from all other schools in the county, and which already promised to be one of the greatest and most successful meets ever held.

Hugh and his chums were every one of them entered for several events; indeed, it would have been like looking for a needle in a haystack to try and find a single Scranton boy above the age of ten, and sound of wind, who had not taken advantage of the generous invitation to place his name on the records, and go in for training along a certain line. Those who could not sprint, leap the bars, throw hammer or discus, or do any other of the ordinary stunts, might, at least, have some chance of winning a prize in the climbing of the greased pole, the catching of the greased pig, the running of the obstacle race, or testing their ability to hop in the three-legged race, where each couple of boys would have a right and left leg bound together, and then attempt to cross a given line ahead of all like competitors.

So even when they started out after lunch the whole five were a bit tired; and a vast store of nuts, like the one they were fetching home, can-

not be gathered, no matter however plentiful they may be on ground and trees, without considerable muscular effort on the part of the ambitious collectors.

Consequently, every fellow was feeling pretty stiff and sore about the time we overtake them on the way home. Besides, most of them had zigzag scratches on face and hands by which to remember the wonderfully successful expedition for several days. Then there was Julius Hobson with a soiled handkerchief bound around his left thumb, which he solicitously examined every little while. He had, somehow, managed to catch a frisky little squirrel, which, wishing to take home, he had imprisoned in one of his side pockets that had a flap; but, desirous of fondling the furry little object, he had incautiously inserted his bare hand once too often; for its long teeth, so useful for nut-cracking, went almost through his thumb, and gave his such an electric shock that in the confusion the frightened animal managed to escape once more to its native wilds.

Hugh, as he went along toward home, was really taking mental notes concerning the lay of the land, and with an object in view. He was entered for the fifteen-mile Marathon race (an unusually long distance for boys to run, by the way, and hardly advisable under ordinary conditions), and one of the registering places where every contestant had to sign his name to a book kept by a judge so as to prove that he had actually reached that par-

ticular and important corner of the rectangular course, had been the quaint little old road tavern just half a mile back of them.

"You're wondering just why I'm so curious about the country up here, I can see, fellows," Hugh was saying about the time we meet them; "and, as we all belong to the same school, and our dearest wish is to see Scranton High win the prize that is offered by the committee in the Marathon, I don't mind letting you in. I know something about this country up here, and have traced on a surveyor's chart the ordinary course a fellow would be apt to take in passing from the second tally post, that old tavern back of us, along this road to the canal, and from there across the old logging road to Hobson's Pond, where there's going to be the last registering place before the dash for home. Well, I've figured it out that a fellow would save considerable ground if he left this same road half a mile below, and cut across by way of the Juniper Swamp trail, striking in again along about the Halpin Farm."

His remarks created no end of interest, for there were several others among the bunch who had also entered for that long-distance race; and, naturally, they began to figure on how they might take advantage of Hugh's discovery. It was all for the honor and credit of good old Scranton High; so that it really mattered little just which fellow crossed the line first, so long as he "saved the bacon."

"It sounds pretty fine to me, Hugh," said Julius, "only I don't like one thing."

"What's that, Julius?" demanded the Juggins boy.

"By following that Juniper Swamp trail and the old road Hugh mentions, we'd have to pass close to that deserted stone quarry; and say, the farmers all vow it's sure haunted."

CHAPTER II

ON THE OLD QUARRY ROAD

When Julius made this assertion, the other fellows looked at each other in what might be said to be a queer way. In fact, they had all heard certain absurd stories told in connection with the old quarry that had not been worked for so many years that the road leading to it across country had grown up in grass and weeds. Some adventurous boys who went out there once declared it was a most gruesome place, with pools of water covered with green scum lying around, and all sorts of holes looking like the cave Robinson Crusoe found on his island home to be seen where granite building rocks had been excavated from the towering cliffs.

It was K. K. who laughed first, actually laughed scornfully, though Julius took it all so seriously. Thad Stevens followed with a chuckle, after his peculiar fashion.

"You give me a pain, Julius, you certainly do," ventured K. K.

"To think," added Thad, assuming a lofty air of superior knowledge, "of a fellow attending

Scranton High believing the ridiculous yarns these uneducated tillers of the soil and their hired help pass around, about there being some sort of a genuine *ghost* haunting the old quarry—why, it's positively silly of you, Julius, and I don't mind telling you so to your face."

"Oh, hold on there, fellows!" expostulated the other boy; "I didn't say that I really and truly believed any of those awful stories, did I? But so many different persons have told me the same thing that, somehow, I came to think there *might* be some fire where there was so much smoke. Of course, it can't be a ghost, but, nevertheless, there are queer goings-on about that deserted quarry these nights—three different people, and one of them a steady-going woman in the bargain, assured me they had glimpsed moving lights there, a sort of flare that did all sorts of zigzag stunts, like it was cutting signals in the air."

"Hugh, do you think that could be what they call wild-fire, or some folks give it the name of will-o'-the-wisp, others say jack-o'-lantern?" demanded Horatio Juggins, who had been listening intently while all this talk was going on.

"I'd hardly like to say," replied Hugh thoughtfully. "As a general thing that odd, moving light is seen in low, damp places. Often it is noticed in graveyards in the country, and is believed to be induced by a condition of the atmosphere, causing something like phosphorescence. You know what a firefly or lightning bug is like, don't you, Ho-

ratio? Yes, and a glow-worm also? Well, they say that there are black-looking pools of stagnant water lying around the old quarry; and yes, I think the lights seen might come from just such conditions."

"That sounds all very well, Hugh," continued Julius, "but what about the terrifying cry that sometimes wells up from that same place?"

"A cry, Julius, do you say?" exclaimed Horatio, his eyes growing round now with increasing wonder and thrilling interest, "do you really and truly mean that, or are you only joshing?"

"Well," the narrator went on to say soberly, "two fellows told me they'd heard that same shriek. One was hunting a stray heifer when he found himself near the quarry, and then got a shock that sent him on the run all the way home, regardless of trees he banged into, for it was night-time, with only a quarter-moon up in the western sky. The other had laughed at all such silly stories, and to prove his bravery concluded to venture out there one night when the moon was as round as a cartwheel. He got close to the deserted workings when he too had a chill as he heard the most outlandish cry agoing, three times repeated, and——well, he grinned when he confessed that it took him just about one-fifth the time to get back home that he'd spent in the going."

"Whee! perhaps there may be some sort of wild animal in one of the caves they tell about up

there?" ventured Horatio. "I'm not a believer in ghosts, and I don't consider myself a coward, either; but all the same it'd have to be something pretty big to induce me to walk out there to that same lonely quarry after nightfall. Now laugh if you want to, K. K."

"Well," interrupted Hugh, just then, "we're approaching the place right now where that old quarry road I spoke of starts in. I'd like ever so much to take a look at that same quarry, by daylight, mind you. Is there any objection, fellows, to our testing out that road right now? It used to be a pretty fair proposition I've been told, so far as a road goes, and I think we could navigate the same in this car. K. K. how do you stand on that proposition, for one?"

"Count me in on anything that promises an adventure, Hugh, came the prompt reply. "There is plenty of gas in the tank, and if we do get a puncture on the sharp stones we've got an extra tube along, with lots and lots of muscle lying around loose for changing the same. That's my answer, Hugh."

"Thad, how about you?" continued the shrewd Hugh, well knowing that by making an individual appeal he would be more apt to receive a favorable response, because it goes against the average boy's pride to be accounted a weakling, or one addicted to believing old wives' fairy stories of goblins, and all such trash.

"Oh, count me in, Hugh," responded the other,

with an indifference that may possibly have been partly assumed; but then Thad Stevens was always ready to back his enterprising chum, no matter what the other suggested.

"Horatio, it's up to you now!" Hugh went on remorselessly, as K. K. stopped the car at a signal from the other, and faint signs of what had once been a road were to be distinguished just on the left.

"Majority rules, you know," said the wise Juggins boy, "and already three have given their assent; so it's no back-out for little Horatio."

"Course I'll agree, Hugh," quickly added Julius, when he saw that the other had turned toward him. "I'm just as curious as the next fellow to see that old haunted quarry—in the daytime, of course. Besides, everybody knows there isn't any such thing as a ghost. All such stories, when they're sifted down, turn out to be humbugs. Sometimes the moving spectre is a white donkey browsing alongside the road. Then again I've heard of how it was a swing that had a white pillow left in it by the children, and the night wind caused it to advance and retreat in a *terrible* way. Hugh, let's investigate this silly old business while we're on the spot."

And by these wonderfully brave words Julius hoped to dissipate any notion concerning his alleged timidity that may have lodged in the brains of his chums.

So K. K. started up again, and by another min-

ute the old car had passed in among the trees, with the overgrown brush "swiping" against the sides every foot of the way. It was necessary that they proceed slowly and cautiously, because none of them had ever been over that long disused road before, and all sorts of obstacles might confront the bold invaders of the wilds.

Hugh was using his eyes to good advantage, and at his advice the others did the same. It was a good thing the car was old, and that it mattered nothing how these stiff branches scraped against the sides during their forward progress. K. K. knew how to manage, all right, and, although the trail was quite rough in places where the heavy rains had washed the earth away, and left huge stones projecting, he was able to navigate around these obstacles successfully.

Twice they came to low places where water ran, and there was some danger of the heavy car becoming mired. At such times several of the boys would jump out, and after investigating the conditions perhaps throw a mass of stones and pieces of wood in, to make what Hugh called a sort of a "corduroy road" across the swampy section of ground.

It was all very interesting in the bargain, and, for the time being, the boys even forgot the fact that they were exceedingly tired.

Then they seemed to be gradually ascending a grade, where the road turned out to be somewhat better.

"I imagine we're getting close to the quarry now, fellows," Hugh informed them; "if what I was told is true. It will lie over here on the right; and only for the dense growth of trees with their foliage still hanging on, we might see the cliff forming the background of the quarry right now."

Julius and Horatio looked around them with increasing interest, and perhaps a slight flutter of unusual vigor in the region of their hearts. It was about as gloomy a scene as any of them had ever gazed upon. Years had elapsed since work in the stone quarry had been abandoned, and Nature, as usual, had done her best to hide the cruel gashes made in her breast by man; the trees had grown and spread, while bushes and weeds extended their sway so as to almost choke everything around. The distant cawing of the crows sounded more gruesome than ever amidst such surroundings; but there was no sign of bird-life to be seen. It was as though the little feathered creatures found this region too lonely even for their nest building. Not even a red or gray squirrel frisked around a tree, or boldly defied the intruders of his wilderness haunt.

"There, I just had a glimpse of the place through an opening!" suddenly announced Hugh; "I calculate that we'll soon come in plain sight of the whole business, for this road leads straight across the dumps, I was told, and then on again in the direction of Hobson's Pond."

The sun was passing behind the first cloud of

the whole day just then. Somehow the added somber conditions had an effect on all the boys; for, with the temporary vanishing of the king of day, the shadows around them appeared to grow bolder, and issue forth from their secret retreats.

"Ugh! this is certainly a fierce place for a fellow to visit, say around midnight," K. K. was forced to admit, for he was the essence of candor at all times.

"Wild horses couldn't drag me up here at such a time as that," said Horatio, as he looked ahead, and shivered, either with the chill of the air, or from some other reason, he hardly knew himself.

"Hugh, would you try it if someone dared you to?" demanded Julius suddenly, taking the bull by the horns, so to speak.

"I don't think I would, on a dare," replied the other calmly, yet deliberately, as he smiled at the speaker; "but if there was any good and sufficient reason for my doing the same, I'd agree to come alone, and spend a whole night in the deserted quarry. However, I'm not particularly *hankering* after the experience, so please don't try to hatch up any wild scheme looking to that end. If you want to come, Julius, you're welcome to the job."

Julius shuddered, and looked a bit pale at the very thought.

"Oh! I wasn't even dreaming of it, Hugh," he hastened to declare. "I'd much prefer to being asleep in my own comfy bed at home when midnight comes around, and the last thing on earth

you'd catch me doing would be out hunting spooks."

It was just as Julius finished saying this that they received a sudden shock. A loud and thrilling sound, not unlike a human shriek, came to their ears, filling each and every boy in the car with a sense of unmitigated horror. It was so exceedingly dreadful that K. K. involuntarily brought the auto to a full stop, and then turned a face filled with mingled curiosity and awe upon his comrades.

CHAPTER III

TALKING OF GHOSTS

"THAT was no crow cawing, boys, believe me!" ejaculated K. K.

"Crow! Well, I should say not!" added Horatio instantly. "If you asked me right to my face I'd mention a donkey braying. Gee! but it was fierce!"

"But what would a donkey be doing away up here at the old quarry, where there hasn't been a stroke of work done these many years; tell me that?" demanded Julius defiantly.

"I don't believe it was a donkey," said Hugh, shaking his head, as though he, too, found himself exceedingly puzzled; "but I'm not in a position to explain the thing. That was certainly a queer noise, for a fact."

"Extraordinary!" assented Thad Stevens.

"Well, I should call it perfectly awful!" Horatio clipped in.

"Horrible would be a better word to describe it," eagerly followed Julius, who, it must be confessed, was trembling all over; of course, not with

fear, or anything like that, but just because of excitement, he assured himself.

"And," continued the sensible Hugh, "if that's the sort of noises these farmer folks have been hearing right along, I don't wonder some of them have been nearly scared out of their wits. It was bad enough in broad daylight, with the sun shining; so what must it have seemed like in the moonlight, or when it was pitch dark?"

"Wow! excuse me from coming up here after dusk," muttered Julius. "I'm no ghost-hunter, let me tell you. I know my weak points, and seeing things in the night-time used to be one of the same. They had a great time breaking me of it, too. Even now I sometimes dream of queer things when I've got the nightmare, after eating too big a Thanksgiving dinner; and when I wake up suddenly I'm all in a sweat, and a poor old moth fluttering at the window will give me a start, thinking it's the tiger getting in my East Indian bungalow."

"Well, what's the program, Hugh?" asked K. K. "Shall I start up again, so we can continue our journey along this tough old road; or do you want to get out, and take a hunt around the quarry for the thing that gave those yawps?"

"Get out?" repeated Julius, in a sudden panic; "not for Joseph. Don't count on *me* for any such silly business. I came up here to get walnuts and such; and I'm meaning to stick close to my engage-

ment. Side issues can't tempt me to change my mind. Guess I know when I'm well off."

"It's been several minutes since we heard that sound," Hugh went on to remark; "and, so far, it hasn't been repeated."

"Oh! it came three times, you remember, Hugh," suggested K. K.; "and, like in baseball, I reckon it's three times and out. Whatever it was let out those screeches it's certainly quieted down. How about going on now, Hugh?"

"If I was alone," mused the other, "I really believe I'd be half tempted to take a prowl around, and find out if I could what all the row meant. I never like to pass anything up, when my curiosity is excited."

"Oh, come back again some other time, Hugh, when you're not booked for getting home!" sang out Horatio. "If you put it to a vote I don't believe anybody in this bunch would seem wild to back you up right now. Fact is, I can hear our supper-bell calling me ever so loud. Hey! boys, how about that?"

"Let's get a move on!" Julius hastened to reply, so that there could be no mistaking his sentiments, at least.

Julius was followed by K. K., although the latter shrugged his shoulders as he added:

"Perhaps it looks timid in us doing what we mean to, but really this is none of our business, and we might get in some trouble bothering around here. I read about a house that was said

to be haunted, which story a daring reporter said he'd investigate. He spent a night there, and actually captured the ghost, who turned out to be just an ordinary man, living on a place adjoining the haunted estate. He owned up to being the pallid specter that had been giving the house such a bad name; and said he wanted to buy the property in for a song, as it would find no other purchaser if it had such an evil reputation. Now, maybe somebody wants this quarry for thirty cents, and this is his way of scaring other would-be purchasers away. We don't want to butt in on any such game, you see."

Hugh and the others laughed at such a clever explanation.

"Whatever the truth may be," said Hugh, "I hardly believe it'll turn out anything like that, K. K. But you might as well start on. We're only losing time here, and it seems as though the *thing* doesn't mean to give us another sample of that swan song."

"For which, thanks!" sighed Julius. "I know music when I hear it, and if that's what they call a song of the dying swan excuse me from ever listening to another. I can beat that all hollow through a megaphone, and then not half try."

So the chauffeur started up, and they were soon moving along the rough road that had once, no doubt, been kept in repair, when the heavy wagons carried out the building stone quarried from the hillside, but which was now in a pretty bad shape.

Two minutes afterwards and the road took them directly alongside the quarry dump, where the excavated earth had been thrown. They could now see the cliff rising up alongside. It looked strangely bleak, for, of all things, there can hardly be a more desolate sight than an abandoned stone-quarry, where the weeds and thistles have grown up, and puddles of water abound.

Of course, the boys all stared, as they slowly wound along the road in full view of the entire panorama that was being unrolled before their eyes. They noted how in places there seemed to be deep fissures along the abrupt face of the high cliff. These looked like caves, and some of them might be of considerable extent, judging from their appearance.

"If this great old place chanced to be nearer town," said K. K., managing to get a quick glimpse, although, as a rule, he needed all his attention riveted on the rough road he was trying to follow, "I reckon some of the fellows would have high times exploring those same holes in the hill."

"It's just as well then it's as far distant as happens to be the case," Hugh told him; "because the doctors in Scranton would have broken arms and legs galore to practice on. That same old quarry would make a dangerous playground."

"Oh!"

That was Julius uttering a startled exclamation. He gripped Horatio so severely by the arm that he must have pinched the other. At any rate, Ho-

ratio gave a jump, and turned white; just as though his nerves had all been stretched to a high tension, so that anything startled him.

"Hey! what did you do that for?" snapped Horatio, drawing away. "Think you're a ghost, Julius, and feel like biting, do you? Well, try somebody else's arm, if you please."

"But didn't any of the rest of you see it?" gasped the said Julius, not deigning to quarrel over such a trivial thing as a pinch.

"See what?" asked Steve, still staring hard at the quarry, which they were by now fairly well past.

"Well, I don't know exactly what it was," frankly admitted the disturber of the peace. "But it moved, and beckoned to us to come on over. You needn't laugh, Steve Mullane, I tell you I saw it plainly right over yonder where that big clump of Canada thistles is growing. Course I'm not pretending to say it was a man, or yet a wolf, but it was something, and it sure did move!"

Hugh was looking with more or less interest. He knew how things appear to an excited imagination, and that those who believe in uncanny objects seldom have any trouble about conjuring up specters to satisfy their own minds.

So all of them, save, perhaps, the driver, kept their eyes focussed on the spot mentioned by Julius until the first clump of trees shut out their view of the old stone quarry and its gruesome surroundings.

"I looked as hard as I could," said Horatio, "but never a thing did I see move. Guess you've got a return of your old malady, Julius, and you were seeing things by daylight, just as you say you used to in the dark."

"The only explanation I can give," spoke up Hugh, and, of course, every one lent a willing ear, because, as a rule, his opinions carried much weight with his chums; "is that while Julius may have seen something move, it was only a long, feathery plume of grass, nodding and bowing in the wind. I've been fooled by the same sort of object many a time. But let it pass, boys. We've turned our back on the old quarry now, and are headed for the road again, two miles above Hobson's mill-pond. I only hope we find it better going on this end of the abandoned trail. This jumping is hard on the springs of the car, and also on our bones."

"For one," said Julius, "I hope never to set eyes on the place again."

"Oh! that's silly talk, Julius," commented K. K. "Here's Hugh, who means to take a run out this way again as soon as he can, so as to time himself, and learn just what he can save by cutting across country in the big race. And I wouldn't be surprised if he put 'Just' Smith up to the dodge, in addition to Horatio here and myself, all being entered as contestants in the big Marathon race."

"I certainly feel that way, K. K.," admitted

Hugh firmly. "It strikes me this is going to be worth trying. If one of our crowd can save time by taking this route, while the other fellows go all the way around by road, that same thing may give Scranton High the clinching of the prize. It's all fair and square, too, for the conditions only demand that the runners refuse all sorts of lifts while on the road, and register at each and every tally place designated. If they can cut a corner they are at liberty to do so."

"Oh! well," said Julius; "I'm not entered in the Marathon, luckily enough, so you see there's no need of my prowling around this spooky place again. I haven't lost any quarry, that I know of; and Scranton is a good enough place for me to do my athletic exercises in. But, Hugh, if you should happen to find out about the thing that emitted all those frightful squawks, I hope you'll promise to let us know the particulars."

"I can promise that easily enough, Julius," the other told him; "though, just at present, my only concern is to gain time by this cut-off, and so win the big event for our school. Now suppose we drop this subject, and return to something pleasant."

They continued to bump along the rocky road with its deep ruts. At times K. K. had to make little detours in order to navigate around some obstacle which could not be surmounted; for time had not dealt lightly with the quarry road, and

the rains and wintry frosts had played havoc with its surface.

But, eventually, they sighted light ahead. Steve was the first to glimpse an opening, and announce that the main highway leading down to Scranton must be close at hand. His words turned out to be true, and soon afterwards they issued forth from the covert and found themselves upon the turnpike, headed for home.

Hugh turned around to mark the spot well in his mind, though he knew that it was to be the exit, and not the entrance, to the short-cut, in case he concluded to utilize the quarry road when the great race was on.

CHAPTER IV

IN TRAINING FOR THE GREAT TOURNAMENT

It was an afternoon on the following week, after school hours, and the athletic field bordering the outskirts of the town of Scranton afforded a pretty lively spectacle. Indeed, it could be readily seen that the approaching tournament had taken a great hold upon the young people of the town.

Scores of boys were busily engaged in various exercises, under the watchful eye of Mr. Leonard, the assistant principal under Dr. Carmack. This determined-looking young fellow was a college graduate, and had taken considerable interest in all manner of athletics; indeed, it was well known that he had played on one or more of the college teams during his course, and won quite an enviable reputation for good work, though hardly reckoned a brilliant star.

Many who did not expect to participate in any of the numerous eevnts had gathered to watch what was going on; and, besides, there were clusters of pretty high-school girls on the side lines, chattering like magpies, and venting their opinions regarding the chances certain favorites

among their boy friends appeared to have in the way of winning a prize.

Scores were busily engaged in running around the cinder-path, taking the high jump, trying the hurdles, so as to perfect themselves against the coming Saturday when the wonderful event was to come off; sprinting for the short races of fifty, or a hundred yards; throwing the discus or the hammer, and numerous other lively doings.

Among these participants there were a number whom the reader of previous volumes in this series will readily recognize, and possibly gladly meet again. There was Alan Tyree, for instance, whose masterly pitching had done so much to land the pennant of the Three Town High School League that season for Scranton; Owen Dugdale, the efficient shortstop of the local nine; "Just" Smith, whose real name it happened was Justin, but who seldom heard it outside of school and home. He was a fleet runner, and had ably filled the position of left fielder when Scranton carried the school colors to victory over Allandale in that last heart-breaking game. Besides these, Joe Danvers was on deck, doing all sorts of wonderful stunts at throwing the hammer and taking the long jump, for Joe delighted in a variety of specialties and did not confine himself to any one particular thing; also might be seen one Claude Hastings, a chap who was a regular monkey in his way, and who always kept the crowd laughing by his antics,

such as might be expected of a prize clown at the big Barnum and Bailey circus.

Yes, and there was Nick Lang, as big as life, running like the wind around the cinder-path and looking as though he might have a pretty fair chance to carry off some sort of prize. Nick had for a long time been the town bully. He was not a rich man's son; in fact, Nick's folks were poor, and some people even thought the big, overgrown boy should be at work helping to keep the wolf from the door, instead of still attending high school and making himself a nuisance to decent folks through his delight in practical jokes and his bullying propensities.

But even those who detested Nick Lang the most were willing to admit that he was a pretty fair athlete and could even have excelled along several lines if only he were able to control that nasty temper of his and "play fair."

There were two other fellows, who were cronies of Nick's, and who, apparently, had entered for some of the events, because both Leon Disney and Tip Slavin were in evidence and hard at work practicing.

Nick secretly hated, even as he also feared, Mr. Leonard, because the under-teacher had once cowed him and made him "eat humble pie" before the whole class; but, being a wise as well as pugnacious boy, Nick managed to keep his feelings under control, and when Mr. Leonard was around he usually behaved himself.

Later in the afternoon, when most of the boys out for practice had become more or less tired from their exertions, they gathered here and there in little bunches to exchange "chaff," and express their opinions concerning various matters that had a bearing on the coming tournament.

So Hugh Morgan found himself in a cluster that contained several of his chums, as well as a sprinkling of other fellows. A trio of lively high-school girls hovered near, and occasionally joined in the conversation. They were Sue Barnes, whom Hugh usually counted on as his partner when any dance was given in the country, or at singing-school during the winter evenings; Ivy Middleton, Thad's choice for company, because she was both jolly and genial; and pretty Peggy Noland, whom Owen Dugdale liked, as had also Nick Lang, though the latter had of late been badly snubbed by the scornful Peggy because she could not stand for his rowdy ways.

"Mr. Leonard says he's fully satisfied with the way most of the fellows are showing up," Joe Danvers was saying, about that time.

"Well, we can't afford to loaf, for a fact," remarked Just Smith, soberly. "Let me tell you something, fellows. I was down in Paul Kramer's sporting emporium just last evening, when who should walk in but Big Ed. Patterson, the Allandale pitcher, who came so near to downing us last summer. He looks as fine as silk, and told me privately he calculates on carrying off that

prize offered for hammer throwing, because that is his pet hobby, you see. Yes, and more than that, he said they were all crazy up at his 'burg' over the big meet, boys being out practicing every sort of stunt, even to road-running by moonlight."

"That sounds good to me," Hugh observed, not appearing to show any sign of alarm over the stirring news. "It means we'll have a wonderfully successful affair. Who carries off the prizes is a matter for the different schools to take care of, and those of us who believe in clean, honest sport only hope the best fellows win."

"Huh!" grunted Owen Dugdale, "it goes to show that Allandale is all worked up over losing the baseball pennant to Scranton, and means to get even by carrying off the majority of the prizes our committee has offered for the dozen or more events to be contested for."

"But he also informed me," continued the bearer of news, "that over in Belleville they were just as much excited as in his town, so that every fellow who'd entered for any event, even to climbing the greased pole or the sack race, was diligently practicing his particular stunt. Oh! it's just going to be the greatest athletic tournament ever held in this section of the country, believe me."

Some of the more timid among the boys seemed to think that Scranton would come out second-best when the great meet was a thing of the past;

but others only found themselves more determined than ever to win, after learning how their rivals had entered into the affair with heart and soul.

Hugh's often-expressed motto that the "best man should win" found an echo in the majority of their hearts, and they vied with each other in promising to give every ounce of ability to doing Scranton High credit.

Mr. Leonard came around to have a few words with his boys. He was a great favorite with the majority of the scholars under his charge, and to his clever method of coaching they attributed considerable of their success on the diamond of recent months. If only his rules were strictly adhered to it was possible that Allandale and Belleville might be due for another rude surprise when they came over, bent on carrying off the majority of the high honors.

"It is going to be no easy sledding for anybody,—remember that, fellows," the athletic instructor went on to say, after he had been told how both adjoining towns entered in the meet were striving with might and main to excel in every sort of event. "No matter who wins he'll only get there by doing his level best. That's all Scranton High asks of her representatives. Let there be no loafing, and if some of our good friends from A and B succeed in carrying away a few of the prizes, why, we'll know they earned the right, and are welcome to their reward. And

now, I'd like to see you runners try one more ten-minute sprint, every one of you in a bunch, as a sort of wind-up for the day."

Accordingly they ran off to the starting-point and lined up, each assuming his particular favorite crouching attitude, which he seemed to think best fitted for a speedy "get-away" when the signal was given.

They ran like colts, and some displayed amazing speed, considering that they had been diligently working out on that same cinder-path for over two hours, with little intermissions between for resting.

Those who expected to take part in the Marathon did not attempt to compete with those fleet sprinters, though if they were pressed doubtless they too could give quite an exhibition of fast running.

But Mr. Leonard had taken great pains to inform them that the successful long-distance runners always take things moderately easy in the beginning of a race, preserving as much vigor as possible for the gruelling finish. The chief idea was to keep just behind the pace-maker, and be ready to rush to the front when on the home-stretch. The fellow best able to preserve his full powers for that last half-mile dash would be the one to carry off the honors.

Nick Lang was there with the rest, watching Hugh out of the tail of his eye, as if he considered that in the other he would find his chief com-

petitor; possibly he hoped to be able to pick up valuable points by keeping watch and ward on Hugh. Hugh had even consulted Mr. Leonard with regard to making use of his knowledge concerning that "cut-off." In fact, he wanted to lay any doubts that may have arisen in his own mind concerning its being perfectly legitimate that he should profit by such knowledge.

The athletic instructor assured him he was keeping fully within the conditions of the race in so doing.

"It is any competitor's privilege to go over the route as often as he pleases," was the way Mr. Leonard put it; "and so long as he conforms to the rules, such as keeping on his own feet every yard of the way, accepting no lift from wagon or car, and registering faithfully at the several stations provided, he has done all that is expected of him. If by crossing a field he thinks he can cut off fifty feet or more he is at liberty to make the attempt, although it may cost him dear, through his meeting with some unexpected obstacle in his progress, which would not have occurred had he stayed by the road. Some fellows might believe they could do better than trying to cross by way of that overgrown quarry road. Yes, you are keeping well within the letter of the law in choosing your own way of going, Hugh. Have no fears on that score, my boy."

Mr. Leonard liked Hugh Morgan exceedingly; though that was not to be wondered at, because

Hugh was one of those boys who would never stoop to do a tricky thing, no matter what allurements it held out; he always "played square," and even won the high regard of his rivals in many cases.

When the October sun had reached the horizon the multitude of contestants and spectators commenced to string back to town, for it would soon be getting near supper time; and no fellow likes to be late at the table, especially when he feels as hungry as a bear, after exercising so violently for hours.

Hugh was starting off alone, when Thad Stevens called out that he'd like the other to "hold up a minute," until he could overtake him; because it happened he had something to communicate which he thought Hugh ought to know.

CHAPTER V

TREACHERY IN THE AIR

"HUGH, it looks to me like there's a hen on," was what Thad Stevens said, as he joined his chum.

"That's a queer remark for you to make, Thad," the other chuckled; "after seeing what's been happening here on our athletic field this afternoon, I'd be likely to say there were a good many score of hens setting, each hoping to hatch out one of our dandy prizes next Saturday."

"Oh! you understand that I mean something crooked going on, Hugh," Thad hastened to add.

"That sounds serious enough. What do you know, Thad? The chances are ten to one if anything in the way of trickery is contemplated I can put my hand on the fellow who's guilty of the same."

"Sure thing, Hugh, and his name is Nicholas in the bargain. They call him Young Nick, to distinguish him from his father who's dead and gone; but sometimes people say he's a regular Old Nick when it comes to playing mean jokes, and getting into trouble of all kinds."

"What's Nick Lang been up to now, Thad?"

"Oh! just spying on you, for one thing!" exclaimed the other angrily.

"He's welcome to chase around after me as often as he pleases," said Hugh; "much good will it do him, I'm thinking. But tell me, why should he go to all that bother, when my going-out and coming-in don't interfere with his happiness a whit?"

"Hugh, Nick is on to your scheme for making use of that short-cut across by way of the old deserted quarry!"

"You don't tell me?" Hugh observed. "Well, I came near speaking to him about it myself, Thad. You see, Nick is entered for the Marathon, just the same as a number of other Scranton High boys are. If K. K., Just Smith, and several other fellows are to have the benefit of that cut-off, if they choose to avail themselves of it, why shouldn't Nick be included, I've been asking myself? Yes, and I'd about concluded it was my duty to let him know; but if, as you say, he's found out for himself I'll be saved all the bother of telling."

"He followed you across yesterday, Hugh. By a mere accident I heard him telling Tip Slavin, and he seemed to think it a good joke, because you never once suspected he was spying on you from behind trees and bushes. Why, he says he followed you clear across to the road again."

Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

"Then I give Nick full credit for carrying out a clever piece of business. I never once remember suspecting that anybody was around. But, Thad, what's worrying you? There isn't anything about that discovery to excite you."

"Hugh, that boy means to do something mean, and it's got a connection with the short-cut quarry road in the bargain!"

Hugh turned and looked at the speaker a little gravely.

"I suppose now you've got some good reason for making that accusation, Thad?" he ventured.

"Yes, I have," came the quick reply. "I heard him say something to that other sneak which I couldn't just catch, but it started Tip laughing like everything. He slapped a hand down on his knee, and went on to say: 'Fine, Nick, finer than silk! I bet you he'll be as mad as hops if he finds himself caught in such a trap, and loses the race. You can depend on me every time. My affair comes off right in the start, and I can easy get out there on my wheel long before the first runner heaves in sight. I'll coach Pete Dudley in his part, just as you were saying. It's the greatest trick you ever hatched up, Nick, the very greatest!' Now, you can judge for yourself, Hugh, whether it's safe for you to try to cross by that same quarry road when the big Marathon race is on."

Hugh seemed lost in thought for a brief interval. When he spoke again there was a settled look

of grim determination on his face that Thad could easily understand, knowing the other as well as he did.

"It isn't my way to show the white feather when the first cold wind starts to blowing, Thad, and no matter what Nick is planinng to do I'm not going to give him the first chance to profit by my discovery of that short-cut route from road to road."

"That means you decline to be shoved off the path, does it, Hugh?"

"If I start in that race, as I expect to," Hugh told him, "I intend to make use of that short-cut, no matter if a dozen Tip Slavins, and Pete Dudleys are lying in wait to trip me up. But I'm much obliged to you all the same, Thad, for your warning. I'll be on my guard from this time on, and they're not going to trap me with my eyes blinded, I tell you that."

Thad seemed to be lost in thought himself for a minute or so. Possibly he was trying to figure out how he could best serve his comrade in such an emergency. The gloomy woods surrounding the old quarry did not possess any attraction in the eyes of Thad Stevens. Though he had not shown the same degree of alarm as Horatio and Julius at the time they heard those remarkable sounds, so like human shrieks, nevertheless, Thad felt no hankering after another similar experience.

Still he would brave much in order to help the

chum whose interests were so dear to his own heart. He did not say what was in his mind, only looked a bit wise, as he once more turned to Hugh, as though his mind had been finally made up.

"Just as you think best, Hugh," he went on to say quietly. "It may be that one or more of the other fellows will be taking advantage of that same old road, and there's safety in numbers, you know, they say. Nick is likely to get his fingers burned if he attempts any of his silly tricks. What do you suppose now he could plan to have those chaps do? They wouldn't want to really hurt you, because that might get them in bad with Captain Wambold, our police head. Can you think of any fool play he'd be apt to conjure up, such as might make Tip say it was the best and slickest scheme he'd ever heard about?"

"Nick has so many wild ideas that he's likely to attempt nearly anything," said Hugh. "If he could find a good place where a runner would have to keep to the road I even believe he'd try to dig a deep pit, and cover the same over, just as the wild-animal catchers do in Africa, when they go out after big game for the menageries and zoos."

"Why, would that work, do you think, Hugh?" cried the startled Thad, mentally picturing his chum crashing through a false roadbed, and dropping down into a deep hole from which, alone and unaided, he could not hope to escape until much time had elapsed, and all hope of winning the big Marathon was lost.

"It might have done so if I hadn't chanced to possess a wide-awake chum, who gave me due warning, and caused me to keep a sharp lookout. As it is, if I glimpse a suspicious spot in my path I'll fight mighty shy of the same; or by a big leap give it the go-by. Of course, there might be other ways in which they could hope to detain me, such as dropping down on my shoulders from a tree, and with their faces covered so I couldn't recognize them."

Thad looked grave.

"Yes, they could do that, for a fact," he admitted. "Seems to me you'll have to keep one eye aloft all the while, Hugh, while the other is watching the ground for treachery. I must say this is a fine state of affairs. Not only does Scranton High have to go smack up against all the best runners of Allandale and Belleville, but be on the lookout for treachery at home besides. I'd give something to be one of a bunch of indignant fellows to take Nick Lang and his two pals out to the woods some fine night, and give the same a coat of tar and feathers, or else ride them on a rail. They're a disgrace to the community, and Scranton ought to take them in hand right away. That boy will set the town on fire yet I'm thinking, with his desperate tricks."

"He will, unless he soon sees a light, and turns over a new leaf," admitted Hugh, who, it seems, had an idea of his own in connection with the said Nick, which, perhaps, he might find an opportun-

ity to work out one of these days; but which he did not care to confide to his chum, because he knew Thad would be apt to consider it impossible, perhaps foolish.

"There they go now, Hugh," suddenly remarked Thad in an undertone. "You see, he has both Tip and Leon along with him, and they're grinning as they look over this way. I warrant you Nick has been elaborating on that fine scheme of his; and, in anticipation, they can already see you held up in that lonely place, kicking your toes at the bottom of a miserable pit, or else tied to a tree."

"Don't scowl so savagely, Thad," warned Hugh. "There's no need of letting them understand we're on to their game. The advantage always lies in catching the other fellow off his guard. Let's laugh while we walk past, as if we'd been figuring out how a certain prize was already dangling close to our fingertips."

So Thad managed to "take a brace," profiting by the sage advice of his comrade; and, as they passed Nick and his two cronies, Hugh remarked as pleasantly as he could:

"I've been watching you run to-day, Nick, and I honestly believe you are right up with the top-notchers in the game. There may be some surprises next Saturday for those who think they've got it all figured out who's going to win the prizes. And Nick, as far as I'm concerned, I'd like to see you take the long-distance prize, honestly and

cleanly, if I can't get it myself. You're a representative of Scranton High, Nick, and we're all out to see the old school do herself proud."

Nick seemed taken aback by these hearty words on the part of the fellow whom he had so long sought an opportunity to injure. He shot a hasty glance, accompanied by the uplifting of his heavy eyebrows, toward his companions, who, thereupon, catching a sly wink, perhaps, both chuckled audibly as though amused.

"Oh! I've already as good as copped that Marathon prize," Nick went on to say, at the same time thrusting out his chin in his customary aggressive and boastful fashion. "I calculate to give the folks some surprise by the ease with which I'll come in away ahead of the next competitor. There'll be a wheen of those who also ran, bringing up the tail of the procession. Long-distance is my best suit, and I've waited a while to show up certain chaps in this town who think they are just the thing. Don't worry about me, Morgan; Nick Lang generally gets there when he throws his hat into the ring."

At that the other two laughed uproariously, as though they thought the joke too good for anything. Possibly they took Nick's reference to "those who also ran" to mean Hugh Morgan particularly; and in their minds they could see him desperately trying to break his bonds; or climb up out of the deep pit into which he had gone crashing when the covered mattress, formed of slender

twigs and dead leaves, had given way under his weight.

Hugh and Thad walked on, the latter fairly boiling with illy-suppressed anger.

"That fellow always gives me a pain, Hugh," he was saying, as they increased the distance separating them from the still merry trio in the rear. "He is really the meanest boy you could find in all the towns of this country. But fellows like him sometimes catch a Tartar; so, perhaps, it might happen in this case," and Thad, who evidently had something on his mind, would not commit himself further, as they walked on in company.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROWLER

THERE had been considerable of a change in connection with the big open field where the boys of Scranton were allowed by the town council and mayor to play baseball, and also football, since summer waned. Somehow the success that attended the work of Scranton High in the battles of the Three Town League, as narrated in an earlier volume of this series, seemed to have stirred up many of the leading citizens. Besides, Mr. Leonard, the efficient under-principal of the high school, with a genuine love and sympathy for all boys in his heart, had kept things at boiling pitch.

Consequently there was, first of all, a move made to lease that splendid field for a long term of years, from the owner, so that the young people of Scranton might have some central place to gather for all sorts of outdoor games and sports.

So subscriptions were started looking to collect a fund with which not only to erect some sort of decent grandstand, but a building that would contain a number of conveniences such as most athletic grounds and similar institutions can boast.

This building had now been completed, and the boys were in full possession. It contained, among other things, a score and more of lockers, where the one who paid a small fee could keep his "fighting togs," as Thad Stevens was wont to term his baseball clothes, or it might be the scanty raiment he wore when exercising on the athletic field, running, or boxing, or wrestling.

Each boy who hired such a locker, of course, carried the key to the same; and when engaged in practice work rested easy in the belief that his street garments were securely taken care of.

There was also a shower-bath and a pool in the building, as well as several other conveniences that could be used in the summer time during the hot weather. The boys arranged to take turns in shifts with regard to keeping the building clean, and thus far the scheme had worked very well; for the town did not care to go to the extra expense of hiring a custodian.

Besides this, a high fence was ordered to be built around the entire grounds, for most other towns had their athletic fields enclosed. It would keep the rowdy element from disturbing the players when any game was in progress; and, as a small admission fee might often be asked, having one or two gates through which admission to the grounds could be obtained would facilitate matters greatly.

But this was not all. Scranton had awakened to the fact that Nature had been rather unkind to

her young people, in that there was no large lake, or even so much as a small river close by her borders. When the boys and girls of the town felt inclined to skate after a sharp freeze along about New Year's Day, they had to walk all the way out to Hobson's mill-pond, situated between half and two-thirds of a mile away. This was not so bad for some of the sturdy chaps, but there were others who disliked taking such long tramps, especially after violent exercising for hours, it might be, on the ice.

So, after mature deliberation, and receiving valuable suggestions from Mr. Leonard, as well as others who had seen similar things successfully carried out in various places, it had been arranged to flood the field after winter had fully set in. Then, during the time of severe weather, the young folks would have a splendid sheet of ice right at their doors, a comfortable retreat into which they could go to warm up, or to put on and remove their skates.

Here various games were expected to be indulged in, as the weather permitted; and already a fine hockey Seven had been organized, under the leadership of Hugh Morgan, with a promise of many exciting games against rival teams.

The high board fence was being erected, but would hardly be completed before Spring; still, it gave an air of business to the grounds, and the boys had already begun to congratulate themselves over the great stride forward Scranton had

taken in the way of catering to her rising population.

Of course, there were those in the town—you can always find a few in every community—who seriously objected to so much "good money being wasted," as they termed it, on such trivial things, when Scranton really needed an up-to-date library building in place of the poor apology for one that had to serve.

These people, doubtless from worthy motives, though they were short-sighted in their opposition, lost no opportunity for running down the entire enterprise. The person who, perhaps, had more influence than any of the others, and was more vehement in deriding the "foolish expenditure of funds along such silly lines, instead of trying to elevate the standard of reading among Scranton's young people," was the rich widow, Mrs. Jardine.

She had a son named Claude, whose life was rendered miserable by the lofty ambition of his mother to make him a *genius*. She never ceased talking upon all sorts of elevating subjects; and where other boys were allowed to lead normal lives, and have lots of innocent if strenuous fun during vacations, and holidays, poor Claude led a life of bondage.

He was rather an effeminate-looking boy, tall and slender, with a face entirely destitute of color such as would indicate abounding spirits and good health; but it was no wonder, everyone knew how

he was being made such a "sissy" of by his doting "mamma."

Despite all this there seemed to be a spark of ordinary boyish spirits concealed under Claude's superior airs. He sometimes stood and watched the other fellows engaged in playing prisoner's base, or some such rough-and-tumble game, with envy. Once upon a time his mother, chancing to pass along the street in her fine car, was horrified to discover her darling Claude actually taking part in some "rowdy game," in which he scrambled with the rest just as vehemently, and was, moreover, even worse off than the other boys with regard to soiled garments and disheveled hair. Evidently the long suppressed spirit of the lad had broken bounds, and for once he allowed himself to be natural.

The other fellows never tired of telling how she had called to him almost frantically, as though she believed he had become inoculated with some deadly germ, and must be contaminated, bundling the boy into the car, and actually crying with dismay when she found that he actually had a *scratch* upon his nose, which had been bleeding. But it was also noticed that Claude grinned at his late fellow wrestlers as he was borne triumphantly away, as though to emphasize the fact that he had, at least, enjoyed one real period of excitement in his life, to remain as a bright spot for many days.

Hugh had often wondered whether there might

not be some way through which this deluded mother might be shown what a terrible error she was making in bringing up her boy to be so inane and useless. He needed physical development more than any other fellow in Scranton High. Constant feeding upon lofty ideas, and never given a chance to develop his muscles, was wrecking his health. Mr. Leonard had even gone to Mrs. Jardine and entreated her to let him undertake a moderate programme of athletic exercises with Claude; but he might as well have tried to lift the high-school building as to make her change her set ideas.

Hugh and Thad had been out on a particular night after supper, visiting another boy who chanced to live on the outskirts of town. He had received a wonderful collection of curios from an uncle living out in India, after whom he had been named; and upon being especially invited over to view these things, which included a wonderful assortment of rare postage stamps, the two chums had made it a point to accept, being greatly interested in all boyish "hobbies."

That was how they happened to be passing along the road close to the athletic grounds about half-past nine o'clock that same night.

There was a fair moon shining, but objects appeared more or less misty, as often occurs under such conditions. The boys had about exhausted their vocabulary of words that express delight, in examining the many things of interest shown by

"Limpy" Wallace, who was a cripple, and had to use a crutch, he being also a great admirer of Hugh Morgan, whom he considered in the light of a hero.

Besides this, both boys were unusually tired after the exertions of the day, and Thad frequently yawned in a most terrific fashion, as he walked homeward. Probably these were the main reasons for their unnatural silence, as they stalked along side by side; since it is seldom that two lads will refrain from exchanging opinions on some subject or other, when in company.

Afterwards, in the light of what happened, they were inclined to believe that it was exceedingly fortunate they had lapsed into this queer condition of silence, for, otherwise, they would have missed something that proved unusually interesting, as well as afforded them more or less excitement.

It was Thad who discovered it first. Perhaps he chanced to be looking that way while Hugh was star-gazing. At any rate he gripped his chum suddenly by the arm.

"Sh! Hugh, what's that yonder, a skulking dog, or a fellow half bent over?" was what Thad whispered in the ear of his chum.

Both of them had come to a full stop, under the impulse of the moment; and Thad was pointing a little to the right, which was where the building erected on the athletic grounds stood, dimly seen in the mysterious moonlight.

So Hugh, staring quickly, made out the object indicated by his companion. Really, he could hardly blame Thad for asking such a question, because at first it was next to impossible to determine whether it was a four-footed creature, or a human being who, for some good reason, was trying to make himself appear as small as possible.

But as Hugh continued to look he saw the other raise himself to his full height, as though to take a cautious survey of his surroundings. Then he knew that it was no canine prowling around to discover scraps thrown aside by the carpenters working on the board fence, as they ate their noon lunch.

"It's a human being all right, Thad," Hugh whispered, in such a low tone that even the sharpest pair of ears going could never have caught the sound ten feet away.

"Man, or boy, Hugh?" asked Thad, copying the example set by the other, and even bending his head so that his lips might come closer to Hugh's right ear.

"Can't make that out," he was told.

"But what in the wide world is he trying to do?" pursued Thad, his curiosity now fully aroused, as the unknown again started to move forward, pursuing the same strange cautious tactics as before.

"That's what we ought to find out," Hugh told him. "I don't like the way he's sneaking around here. It looks as if he might be up to some game."

"Oh! perhaps it's a tramp," suggested Thad, as the idea dawned upon his brain.

"He may be meaning to break into the building, to sleep there to-night. I wouldn't put it past a hobo to steal anything he could find left in the lockers. Hugh, it's up to us to put a kink in his rope. Let's chase after him before he disappears."

CHAPTER VII

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

"Hold on, Thad," continued Hugh, as he put a restraining hand on the shoulder of his more impulsive chum, "we've got to be careful, or else he'll learn how we're meaning to spy on him. Bend over, and do the grand sneak act."

"He's headed straight for the building, Hugh!" breathed the other, as he complied with the directions given by the one whom he was accustomed to look upon in the light of a leader.

"That's right, and I guess he's meaning to crawl inside, if only he can find a window that's been left unfastened. Steady now, Thad; he's stopped under one right now!"

They continued to crouch there and watch what went on, their eyes glued upon the dimly seen figure of the unknown. Greatly to the surprise of Thad, the party stepped to one side, and seemed to be dragging back a heavy plank, not of any vast length, but sufficiently long to reach the window when placed on a slant.

"Say, did you notice how he seemed to know just where that plank was lying, Hugh?" asked

Thad deliriously. "Seems like he must have been spying out the land by daylight beforehand."

"You're right there," whispered Hugh; "and he acts as if he felt pretty certain that particular window would be unfastened, in the bargain."

"Hugh, that settles it," added the other sturdily, as though now fully convinced.

"Yes, settles what, Thad?"

"Why, it's a *boy,* don't you see, and he must have left that window unlatched on purpose this afternoon when some of the fellows were shutting up."

"Wait and see," advised Hugh, although almost convinced of the same thing himself.

The test was not long in coming. They could see the other "shinning" up the sloping plank, as any athletic boy would be apt to do, without any particular trouble. Now he had reached the window, and Thad held his breath in suspense. He sighed as he heard a slight squeaking sound. Evidently the sash which was supposed to be fastened every night through ordinary prudence, had given way to his hand, when he exerted some pressure.

"He's going in, Hugh!" Thad observed, again laying a quivering hand on the arm of his comrade, and then following these words with a low exclamation of startled wonder: "Oh! look there, what's that queer glow mean?"

Hugh understood readily enough.

"Why, he's got one of those little handy elec-

tric torches, you see, and is using it so as to get his bearings inside the building."

"Guess you're right, Hugh," admitted the other; "and there, he's crawling over the sill now, as sure as anything. Oh! the skunk, what can he be up to?"

"We'll try and find out," said Hugh, with his usual promptness. "Now he's gone further from the window let's be moving along. That plank ought to make it easy sledding for fellows like us."

Indeed, it would be hard to find a couple of more athletic boys than Hugh and his chum. Their intense love for every type of outdoor sport had kept them in splendid physical condition, so that their muscles were as firm as those of an athlete in training. To make their way up that sloping board and reaching the open window was likely to prove a mere bit of child's play with such fellows.

Hugh was the first to ascend. When he had raised himself so that he could peep over the window ledge and see within the building he apparently found the coast clear; for Thad, coming along just behind, received a gentle prod with a toe, twice repeated, which he knew to be a signal that all was well.

By the time Thad arrived the other was already well within the room, having slipped across the window-sill without making the slightest sound. All was dark around them, but further on they

could see that weird shaft of light moving this way and that, indicating the spot where the unknown intruder just then happened to be located.

"He's making for the locker room, don't you see, Hugh?" Thad ventured, with a perceptible quiver to his low voice.

"Sure thing, and he knows where he's going, in the bargain," the other went on.

"Of course, it's no hobo, then," continued Thad. "That scamp knows every foot of ground under this roof. You can see it by the way he keeps straight on. Hugh, do you think it might be Nick Lang?"

After all, it was only natural for Thad to jump to this conclusion, because of the evil reputation enjoyed by the boy he mentioned. Nick Lang had been the bully and the terror of Scranton for years. There was seldom a prank played (from stealing fruit from neighboring farmers, to painting old Dobbin, a stray nag accustomed to feeding on the open lots, so that the ordinarily white horse resembled the National flag, and created no end of astonishment as he stalked around, prancing at a lively rate when the hot sun began to start the turpentine to burning), but that everybody at once suspected Nick of being the conspirator.

Possibly he may not have always been the chief offender; but give Dog Tray a bad name and he gets the blame of everything that happens calcu-

lated to outrage the respectability of the law-abiding community.

"I thought of him at first," replied Hugh, "but it strikes me that chap isn't of Nick's build. You see his light leaves his figure pretty much in the dark; for he's using it principally to show him the way, so he won't stumble over any chair, and make no end of a row."

The two had been stealthily creeping forward all this while, and were, therefore, gradually diminishing the distance separating them from the bearer of the electric hand-torch. Thad had evidently been consulting his memory concerning something, for presently he again whispered in his chum's ear:

"Then mebbe it might be Leon Disney, Hugh. Seems to me that sneak would be just the one to try some mean trick like this. And, besides, I happen to know he bought one of those little vest-pocket lights down at Paul Kramer's store only three nights ago, because I saw him testing them and heard him say he'd take it."

"Yes, that looks significant, I must say, Thad. But I'm trying to make out what he's done with his head. Don't you notice he's got it bundled up with a sort of woollen comforter or something like that?"

"Why, so he has," replied the other; "I tell you what, Hugh, he's hoping to hide his face, so if he's discovered prowling around in here no one can say positively that they recognized him. Leon

is up to all those sly tricks. He gets ideas like that out of the stories he's so fond of soaking in."

"Keep still now, Thad, and we'll creep closer," warned the other.

They really had their hands full endeavoring to advance upon the prowler without making any sort of sound that would arouse his suspicions. Hugh realized that if anything of this sort occurred the other would instantly throw the full glow of his little electric torch in their direction, and, of course, immediately discover their presence. If such a thing happened it might interfere with their suddenly arranged plan of campaign, and prevent the capture they contemplated, which would be a grievous disappointment to both boys.

The unknown party had come to a standstill. He stood there in front of the long row of new lockers in which the boys who meant to take part in the principal events of the great athletic tournament kept their possessions, without which they would be more or less handicapped in their practice work.

Thad had made another important discovery; indeed, it struck him as so significant that he could not forbear dragging Hugh down so that he could place his lips against the other's ear and whisper:

"It's *your* locker he's trying to open, Hugh, don't you see?"

Hugh, of course, had already noted this circumstance, and felt duly thrilled, for really it struck him as something more than an accident, and

along the lines of a deep design. Doubtless, his active brain started to wrestle with the problem as to why any one should wish to open his locker, since the only things he kept there consisted of his running jersey and trunks and shoes.

Could it be possible that this was only some small piece of spite-work engineered by his old and inveterate enemy, Nick Lang, and ordered carried out by one of the bully's cronies; while Nick himself made certain to be in good company, so he could easily prove an alibi if accused of the mean trick.

It seemed almost too contemptible to be true, since Hugh could easily purchase other garments down at the sporting-goods store in Scranton. Still, some mean natures are small enough to love to give "stabs" that might annoy the recipient; and boys sometimes grow so accustomed to certain articles of wearing apparel that being compelled to "break in" a new pair of running shoes might lose Hugh the great race!

He gritted his teeth as a wave of indignation swept over him. Really it was high time this contemptible spirit of annoying those he chose to look upon in the light of enemies was crushed in Nick Lang. He had carried on with a "high horse" too long already, and, for one, Hugh felt as though combined action should be taken against him by the respectable fellows of Scranton High.

But it was far from Hugh's intention to stand there and see his locker robbed by such an un-

principled fellow as Leon Disney, if, indeed, the skulker proved to be the party they suspected. Possibly Hugh moved too soon, for it would have been much wiser had he waited until the sneak thief actually had the locker open, and disclosed his full intention.

Urged on to action by his indignation, Hugh started forward. Thad, realizing that it was his chum's intention to do something radical, skipped off a little to the right. He fancied that should the skulker take the alarm and try to flee, making for the open window in the rear, he was apt to turn aside and try to pass by; so his move was intended to block this little game.

It turned out to be needless, for so interested was the fellow with the flash-light in his work of inserting a key in the lock, and trying to turn it, that he did not appear to notice anything wrong until Hugh was close at his elbow. Then, as Thad slipped around to one side to cover all lines of retreat, Hugh reached out a hand and caught hold of the fellow by the shoulder. At the same time he exclaimed in a severe voice:

"Well, what are you doing here, I want to know, trying to break into my locker?"

The other gave a tremendous start, and a low, bubbling cry, half of fright, and also of disgust, came from his lips. The woollen muffler fell from about his face, and, although he snapped off the light just then by a movement of his thumb, the others had glimpsed his features.

Thad had evidently hit the target in the bull's-eye when he mentioned his suspicions concerning the probable identity of the skulker. It was Leon Disney!

CHAPTER VIII

LEON PROMISES TO REFORM

The startled boy struggled to get free, but Hugh had taken a firmer grip upon his person, and saw to it that he could not squirm loose.

"Quit your kicking!" cried Thad, indignantly, when one of the fellow's shoes came in rough contact with his own shins; "or we'll start something along the same lines! We know you, Leon Disney, so there's no use trying to hide your face."

Leaning over, Thad groped around until he managed to find the hand that held the little electric torch. This latter article he tore from the grasp of Leon, and immediately pressed the button that caused the battery to work. The intense darkness around them was dissipated to some degree. Thad threw the glow directly into the face of the fellow Hugh was holding.

Leon stopped his desperate struggles. He realized that the game was up so far as trying to keep his identity a secret; and, being a most resourceful sort of chap, he now resorted to another little scheme which he had undoubtedly thought out, to

be used in case he was discovered, and cornered, while on his night mission.

"Oh! is that you, Hugh?" he burst out, in a shaky voice. "Say, you gave me an *awful* scare! I thought it must be some old tramp that grabbed me, sure I did. It's all right now, Hugh, and I'm not wanting to clear out, since I know who you are. That's Thad, too, I reckon, holding my little flash-light. How you did startle me, though. I never dreamed anybody was around here when I started to come back after my watch."

"What's that you say?" gasped Thad; "your watch? Tell that to the marines, Leon Disney!"

"But it's so, I tell you. Thad, it sure is," persisted the other tenaciously, as though he had laid all his plans for just such an "accident," whereby his attempt to rob Hugh's locker would be held up. "I believe I must have forgotten to take it out of my locker this evening when I was dressing, after hard work on the field, running, and practising throwing the hammer. I never noticed it till long after supper, and I was afraid of what my dad would say when he asked me for it in the morning, to take back to the store where he got it, to exchange for another. So, Hugh, don't you see, the idea came to me that mebbe I might be able to get in the building out here if a window happened to be unfastened; which turned out to be the case, you know."

"Yes, the very *first* window you tackled in the bargain, Leon; how fortunate for you!" sneered

the unbelieving Thad. "And say, you ought to know that this isn't your locker, because the numbers are painted big enough on the door for anybody with only one eye to see."

Even this did not appear to disconcert the other boy. He was a slippery sort of customer, who always seemed able to find some sort of ready excuse, or a way to "climb down a tree" when caught in the act.

He turned, and stared at the number 16 plainly on the door. Then he grinned at Thad as he hurriedly went on to explain further; for his inventive faculties seemed without end when they were exercised in order to get him out of any bad scrape:

"Well, that shows my first guess was the right one after all. You see, Hugh, I knew my number was either 16 or 19, and, for the life of me, I couldn't tell which. Of course, if the first belongs to you when my number is 19, I was foolish to change my mind; though, of course, even if the key opened your locker I'd have known my mistake right away. No harm done, I hope, Hugh?"

Thad made a low, growling sound, as though he put not the slightest faith in the story Leon was telling. He knew the other to be utterly unprincipled, and a willing tool in the hands of Nick Lang; indeed, there were some things about the sneaky Leon that blunt, honest Thad hated worse than the bullying propensities of the other boy.

"So you really and truly left your watch in

your locker, did you?" he demanded, with a perceptible sneer in his tones.

"I think I did; in fact, I'm certainly hoping so," Leon hastily replied; "because if it doesn't happen to be there I don't know where I could have lost it; and I'll get a fine turning over from dad in the morning when he asks me for the same to take back, and exchange for one that keeps decent time."

"Oh!" continued the still skeptical Thad, thinking to corner Leon, "then, perhaps, you'll prove your words by showing us the inside of your locker right now? Number 19 it would be, you said; well, here it is, on a direct line with Hugh's locker. Get busy with your key, Leon, and open up!"

Possibly Thad was confident that the other would not venture to do as he demanded. He may have expected him to invent some handy excuse for not complying; but then the other had already laid the foundation for a reasonable sense of disappointment in case no watch was forthcoming when the locker was opened; since he said he *hoped* he might have forgotten it when dressing, and not lost it on the way home that evening at dusk.

Leon started to obey with alacrity, as though he had no fears. His key immediately opened the door, and this, upon being swung aside, revealed a bundle of old athletic garments hastily thrown in without regard to neatness.

These Leon commenced to eagerly take out, one at a time. He was careful how he handled them, as though fearful lest he might toss the silver watch out, to land on the floor with disastrous results.

As he picked up such various articles of wearing apparel as used by an athlete in training, Leon continued to air his grievances, as though he meant Hugh to understand how utterly impossible it was for him to have intended any mean thing by breaking open a locker other than his own:

"It was silly of me getting those numbers mixed in my head, of course; but then a figure nine is only a six turned upside down, you see. I was so worked up over missing my clock that I just couldn't think straight at all. Well, it isn't under that jersey, anyhow; nor yet covered by those trunks. I remember now I pushed it away back, so I couldn't drag it out. There's an old sweater I use when I'm overheated, and afraid of taking cold; mebbe now it's under that."

Reaching further in, Leon caught hold of the article in question, and carefully drew it toward him. Then he as cautiously lifted the torn sweater; and, as Thad turned the glow of the flash-light directly into the box they all saw the watch reposing in the corner, just as the boy had left it.

Leon made a clutch for his property. He over-

did the matter, Hugh thought, acting in an exuberant fashion.

"Oh! mebbe I'm not joyful over getting my hands on you again, you poor old time-keeper!" he exclaimed, as he snatched the silver watch up and shook it, as though any fault could be attached to the article in question. "A fine chase you've given me to-night; and playing the part of sneak-thief in the bargain; but then, of course, you believe what I told you, now, Hugh, since you've seen that the watch was in my locker!"

Hugh did not care to fully commit himself, it seemed, judging from the way in which he went on to say:

"We've seen you recover your watch all right, Leon; and it was in your locker just as you said; but whether you forgot it, or left it there on purpose, is a question I'm not prepared to settle."

Of course there was no further excuse for Hugh keeping that grip on Leon's shoulder, so he released his hold, and the other gave a sigh as of relief at this evidence of a change in policy on the part of his captor.

"Say, I wish you'd do me a great favor, Hugh," Leon went on to say, as though he believed in the old maxim that it is wise to "strike while the iron is hot."

"As to what?" demanded the one addressed in this whining way.

"What's the use of saying anything about this business?" Leon went on eagerly. "It certainly

wouldn't do any good, and I proved to you that I did enter here just to recover my watch, didn't I? But mebbe it might get to my dad's ears, how I'd gone and been so careless about looking after my property. You see, he told me that if I lost this birthday present he'd not get me another watch till I graduated from high school; and say, I'm beginning to lose all hope of that ever happening in my case. But you will keep mum about it, won't you, Hugh; just to save me from getting up against it rough with my strict dad?"

It sounded like a reasonable request, Hugh must have thought. Besides, no matter what the intentions of Leon may have been, there had really been no harm done, owing to the fact of their being drawn to the spot by discovering his skulking figure dimly outlined in the moonlight.

Hugh considered before committing himself to making any reply. He did not believe most of what the other so glibly declared, partly because he knew very well that Mr. Disney was not a strict parent at all, but a most indifferent one, or he would never have allowed his young hopeful to go in the company of Nick Lang, and take part in many of the other's practical jokes. Some of these had bordered on a serious nature, like the time the electric current was shut off abruptly when the graduation exercises were going on at night-time in the big auditorium in the high-school building; and the ensuing utter darkness almost created a panic among the audience, com-

posed principally of women and young people, the wires having been severed, it was later discovered, at a point where they entered the building.

"I'll say this, Leon," he finally told the waiting boy; "I'll keep quiet about this little thing for three days, and then feel free to mention it, if the necessity arises. I'll make a further bargain with you to this effect; you fight shy of the company of Nick Lang after this, and I'll hold my tongue as long as I understand that you've cut his acquaintance; otherwise, I'll feel free to speak; and there are lots of people in this town who'll believe you had some dark motive back of your breaking into this building to-night. Your reputation is against you, Leon, you understand. Another fellow might enter here, and everybody would believe what he said; but you've long ago lost the confidence of everybody worth while in Scranton. Is it a bargain, then?"

Leon replied with alacrity; but then that was no sign that he meant to keep his word. He had been caught in a downright lie on many another occasion; so Hugh did not place much reliance on his promise to reform.

"Oh! as to that, Hugh," said the crafty Leon, "I've been figuring on cutting away from Nick for a long time now, and I guess I'll do it. He's got me in lots of nasty scrapes, you understand, and then just laughs at me. I'd have given him the shake long since, only he threatened to whip me black and blue if I ever did. But this would

be a good chance to try it out. Yes, I'll promise you to try and break away from Nick; and I hope you'll keep mum about my coming here to-night. If you don't mind, Thad, I'd like to have my flash-light now. And I ought to be going back home in the bargain, because dad doesn't like me to be out nights unless he knows where I'm at."

Thad chuckled as though he considered this last remark in the light of a joke; for Leon roamed the streets until a late hour every night he chose; but, as there was no need of their staying longer, they passed out of the window, and headed toward their respective homes.

CHAPTER IX

SCRANTON IN GALA ATTIRE

That was, indeed, a busy Friday with the students of Scranton High. Lessons had been tabooed entirely, for what was the use of trying to hold the attention of the scholars upon dry subjects when their thoughts continually roamed afield, and seemed concerned only with what great things were scheduled for the next afternoon? Still, they gathered at school, which was a sort of general headquarters where the various committees appointed could consult, and go forth to the work assigned to their particular charge.

The girls were just as enthusiastic as the boys, and demanded equal representation upon a number of the said committees, especially the ones designed for the welcome and entertainment of the vast crowds expected to be present from neighboring towns and villages.

It was going to be an event long to be remembered in Scranton, and the town dressed in gala attire in honor of the occasion. Flags and banners were being displayed as though a great wave of patriotism had overwhelmed the place. If a

stranger had suddenly dropped down on the town just then he must have believed American soldiers were on the fighting line across in France, and that news had been cabled over to the effect that they had met the enemy in their first engagement, and won a decisive victory.

The fairly good town brass band had promised to be on hand, and play during the best part of the afternoon. Then there would be a host of refreshment booths at which Scranton's fairest daughters would preside, accompanied in each instance by a matron of mature years, to lend dignity to the occasion. Here the good folks from Allandale, Belleville and other places, who honored the town with their presence would always be warmly welcomed, and given a cup of delicious tea, coffee or chocolate, as they preferred, accompanied with sandwiches galore, and even cake.

Meanwhile it was planned that those who meant to take part in any of the events on the long programme should have a last "workout" that Friday afternoon. Saturday morning it was intended they should rest up, so as to be in the pink of condition when the meet opened at one o'clock.

That might seem to be an early hour, as some had argued, but the programme was so extended that there was a possibility of darkness creeping up on them before the fifteen-mile Marathon, the greatest event of the day, had been fully completed.

During that energetic morning at school, when

boys and girls were hustling to carry out the part of the work entrusted to them, Hugh had managed to keep an eye on Leon Disney from time to time. He felt pretty certain that the tricky boy had no intention of fulfilling the promise he had made under duress, and while a threat of exposure hung over his head, like the famous sword of Damocles, suspended by but a single hair.

Leon watched Hugh also, and tried to act in a manner calculated not to arouse suspicion; but Hugh understood from his actions how matters probably stood. Leon had, of course, managed to see Nick Lang before coming to school, and explain to him what a bad fix he had managed to get himself in when caught in the act of breaking into Hugh Morgan's locker at the athletic grounds building.

No doubt it had been artfully arranged between the precious pair that Leon was to seem to keep his distance away from Nick; and if at any other time the latter joined a group amidst whom Leon chanced to be standing the other was to immediately move away in an ostentatious fashion that would cause Hugh to believe he meant to keep his given word.

But several times Hugh felt certain he detected sly winks exchanged between Nick and his apparently estranged pal; which could only mean that Leon was playing a double game. Still Hugh did not bother telling anyone about the affair of the preceding night. No harm had really been

done, fortunately, and Leon might hold his evil propensities in check for a while if he had reason to fear disclosure.

The committees were wearing their badges proudly, and every member seemed desirous of doing everything in his or her power to render the athletic tournament a wonderful success. Nothing like it had ever been attempted in the county, and for that reason they were compelled to look up all manner of accounts in papers and magazines, in order to do things properly.

Mr. Leonard was a great help, for he, being a Princeton graduate, and interested in all manner of athletics for years, had kept in touch with such things. Then from various other unexpected sources assistance cropped up. Why, even old Doctor Cadmus, the leading physician of Scranton, proved to be a walking encyclopedia of knowledge concerning the management of such an event; and it turned out that several times long years before, in another community entirely, he had had full charge of just such a tournament; also that he had many articles laid away telling of the modern innovations that had displaced the older method of doing things.

After lunch the young people began to gather on the field by squads and battalions, and it was soon quite an animated sight, with the girls circulating around in gaily dressed bunches, and the various candidates going through their various

stunts under the personal supervision of Mr. Leonard.

There had been more or less talk concerning the advisability of allowing school boys to undertake such a long Marathon race. Fifteen miles, many thought, was far too strenuous an undertaking for lads as yet in their teens. Full-fledged athletes only run twenty miles in all the famous long-distance races, and even at that numbers of them do not finish, the task being too much for them.

But Mr. Leonard was of a different opinion, and he had his way. One thing, however, he did insist on. This was that each and every candidate entering for the Marathon fetch along with him a paper from his family physician, stating that he had undergone a rigid examination to ascertain whether he was in the pink of condition, and without the slightest heart trouble.

Doctor Cadmus gladly examined all the Scranton fellows free of charge, and it was given out to the neighboring towns, from whence aspiring runners hailed, that the lack of such a physician's certificate would debar any candidate from the race.

Hugh, along with several other fellows, intended to take a run of from seven to ten miles over the course that Friday afternoon. They did not wish to follow out the entire course, as that might injure their prospects for the next day, so Mr. Leonard convinced them. But half the dis-

tance would be apt to keep their muscles in good trim.

Before making a start, however, Hugh wished to hang around, and watch what the other fellows were doing. He was deeply interested in the hammer throwing, as well as the sprinting, and, after seeing how well the boys acquitted themselves, felt more than ever assured that Scranton High would pull down quite a number of the fine prizes offered to successful competitors.

It was while things were thus booming that a car rolled past on the main road leading out of town. Hugh noticed it particularly, for he chanced to be over at that side of the extensive field.

There was a chauffeur at the wheel, and in the tonneau a lady and a boy sat, in whom Hugh quickly recognized Claude Jardine and his mother. She held her face deliberately away from the bright scene, as though appalled to know that so many parents in Scranton were so unwise, almost foolish, as to allow their sons to participate in such antics; and their daughters to attend the same.

But Hugh chuckled when he saw Claude give a quick look up at his mother, as if to make certain she was not looking; after which he leaned forward and stared hard and eagerly at the wonderful picture that athletic field presented. Hugh had good eyesight, and he could detect the longing expression in the effeminate features of the

boy whose mother seemed bent on making him a weakling and a "sissy."

"Poor Claude, I certainly do pity you," Hugh was telling himself as the big car rolled on amidst a cloud of dust. "Deep down in your heart you are yearning to be as other natural boys are, who have red blood in their veins. If your dad had lived I warrant there'd be a different story to tell, because they say he liked all kinds of healthy sport; but, somehow, Mrs. Jardine has taken a dislike to such things that seems to keep growing stronger all the time, until it's become a regular mania with her. But unless she changes her mind there'll be a day coming when she'll bitterly regret it all. I suppose now, if she had a daughter she'd prevent her from associating with Sue, and Ivy, and Peggy, as well as all the other high-school girls whose mothers actually allow them to go to dances with us boys, and even cheer the Scranton players in a rattling good baseball game."

There was an air of feverish expectation rampant throughout the whole town, and wherever young people got together the talk was of nothing else save the great event on the programme for the next day. Even many older persons seemed to have become infected with the sporting virus, because memories of other days were being recalled; and it was remarkable how many elderly men had once been deeply interested in just such things, though, of course, along somewhat less modern lines.

Then again there was an undercurrent of talk that carried a thrill along with it. Stories that could not be confirmed, but were believed more or less, began to be circulated to the effect that some irresponsible parties meant to start something during the tournament that was calculated to bring disrepute upon the town of Scranton. It was even darkly hinted that the partly built, new, wooden fence had been set on fire as a lark; and squads of curious boys and girls even circulated along its entire length, bent upon ascertaining if such a thing could really be true.

When they failed to find any evidence of a fire, they were still unconvinced; for, of course, it would be policy on the part of the management to conceal all traces, so as to save the good name of the town.

These rumors could not be traced to any particular source, but there are always a certain number of persons who delight to circulate such stories, and, perhaps, unconsciously, add a little to the same with each and every additional telling, until a trivial happening becomes a colossal thing.

That the committee in general charge of the great undertaking cherished some sort of fear that some daring outrage might be attempted by boys who were not connected with the high school was evident from the fact that they had had warning notices printed at the office of the *Weekly Courier,* notifying all boys who might contemplate

playing any sort of practical joke during the holding of the carnival that Chief Adolph Wambold, the head of the local police, would have his entire force on the grounds, and such offenders would be harshly treated, if detected.

The afternoon was well along when Hugh was approached by "Just" Smith, one of the candidates who meant to try for the Marathon prize.

"Several of the boys are meaning to start off on that seven-mile spin, Hugh," the other announced as he came up; "and they want you to come along. We can start together, and then separate, as we feel disposed;" and, as this suited Hugh, he agreed.

CHAPTER X

WHEN MUSCLES COUNTED

THERE were four of them who made the start, Hugh, "Just" Smith, Horatio Juggins, and "K. K.," the Kinkaid boy. Three of the bunch had been fielders in the baseball nine that carried off the championship pennant of the three-town-high-school league the preceding summer; and, having been known as great runners, it was only natural that they had felt impelled to enter for the long-distance race.

An equal number could be expected from both Allandale and Belleville, so that with others who would feel disposed to, at least, be in at the start, though calculating to fall out after a few miles had been run, possibly a full score would toe the string at the time the great Marathon was called.

In an event of this nature a big "field" adds to the excitement of the occasion; and it is often noticed that those who have no intention of finishing usually look the most confident during the preparations for making the grand start. Well, they have no hope of getting any fun out of the

race after losing sight of the crowd, and so they mean to take what they can beforehand.

Talking is almost tabooed during such a race, since every breath lost in useless conversation saps so much energy. Even on a trial run Mr. Leonard had advised the boys to separate as soon as possible, and keep some distance apart, mostly to obviate this temptation to exchange views; so that each candidate could conserve every atom of his powers.

So it came about that by the time two miles had been run Hugh found himself absolutely alone. Hugh had left the main thoroughfare, and was passing along a byroad that would take him around through the hilly country, until the Scranton turnpike was again reached.

The other fellows had the option of doing as Hugh did, or they could continue on further, and, perhaps, get a lift back home on some farmer's wagon, or possibly a car bound for Scranton. Hugh had an idea, however, that one of them was coming along the same road a mile or more behind, and that it would turn out to be "Just" Smith. Some words the other chap had uttered when they were together before starting forth on the run gave Hugh this impression, though he could not be positive about it.

At the time, it gave him little concern; but then he could not look into the immediate future, and see what it held for him. The coming of "Just" Smith would yet turn out to be an event of the

first magnitude in Hugh's humble opinion; as the reader will soon learn.

Hugh was jogging along nicely, and had long ago caught his second wind. He kept "tabs" upon himself, in order to know just how his energy held out, and if he was likely to be in condition for the gruelling finish that might become necessary, over the last half mile of the long course, should a visiting runner threaten to head the list with the goal in sight, and the thousands of eager spectators bursting out with cheers calculated to thrill the heart, and give fresh impetus to wearied limbs.

On the whole, Hugh felt fairly well satisfied with himself. He knew he had gone about as fast as ordinary runners would care to travel, who wished to conserve their strength toward the close of the race; and that he was holding back a good reserve stock of energy. Yes, he believed he was at his best, and if he failed to land the prize it was because some fellow was a better runner than he could ever hope to be.

Just then he heard a sound that gave him a sudden thrill. It was like a faint human cry for help, uttered in a weak voice, and seemed to come from his right.

Hugh stopped short.

His first inclination was to instantly dash from the road and endeavor to discover what caused that cry. Then he had a wave of suspicion dart over him. Could this be a sly trick on the part of

some enemy, meant to lure him into the brush and rocks, where he could, perhaps, be overpowered? But Nick, as well as his two satellites, Leon Disney and Tip Slavin, had been on the grounds at the time Hugh started his run, for he had taken particular notice of this fact; consequently, it was hardly likely that they could be concerned in any practical joke; and certainly no other fellow would be guilty of such a thing.

That decided Hugh. He left the road, and started toward the spot where he judged that strange sound had welled forth. The country was exceedingly rough just there, and he fancied that some sort of deep gully, possibly a precipice, might lie off on his right, judging from the aspect of the land.

Not hearing the sound again, Hugh uttered a loud hello. Then, as he continued to press hastily forward, he once more caught the beseeching cry. It had an agonizing strain to it, and Hugh could plainly make out the words:

"Help! Oh! help! help!"

Someone was evidently in trouble, Hugh decided, accelerating his pace as well as the conditions of the rough surface of the ground permitted. He had taken pains to locate the cry this time, and was, therefore, altering his course just a little.

Again he called, and once more received a reply, more fearful than before:

"Hurry! Oh! hurry, before it gives way, and I'm lost!"

It sounded more like the voice of a girl than anything else. Hugh was thrilled at the bare thought of one of the opposite sex being caught in a trap whereby life itself was imperiled.

He had been ascending all this time. From a single look, which he cast over his shoulder, he could see the road he had lately come along, trace its course, in fact, until it was lost at a bend half a mile away.

He noted that a runner had just turned that same bend, and was jogging along in a rhythmic, contented fashion, as though satisfied with the progress he was making; although "Just" Smith would have to speed up considerable on the morrow if he wished to be anywhere near the head of the procession when the race neared its close. Hugh, somehow, fixed the fact of his comrade's presence on his mind. He even mentally figured just how long it was likely to take the other to reach the spot where he himself had left the road; for, perhaps, that circumstance might loom up large in his calculations.

Then he arrived at the brink of what seemed to be a precipice. The presence of this told Hugh plainly the nature of the task that awaited him. Someone had undoubtedly fallen over the brink, and was, even then, hanging on desperately to some jutting rock or bush that represented the only hope of safety from a serious fall. He threw

himself down and thrust his head out over the edge. What Hugh saw was enough to give any boy a thrill of horror. Some ten feet below the top a human figure sprawled, kicking with his legs in the endeavor to find a brace for his feet. He was clinging to a bush that seemed to be growing from the face of the precipice, and which Hugh could see was slowly but surely giving way, one root after another losing its grip in the soil and rocky crevices.

Hugh recognized the imperiled boy instantly, though utterly amazed at his discovery; he could not understand for the life of him how Claude Jardine, of all fellows in Scranton, could be placed in such a dreadful predicament.

But Hugh did not waste a single precious second in trying to solve that puzzle; it could be all made plain after he had managed to save the poor chap.

"Stop kicking, and keep perfectly still, Claude!" he instantly called.

"But it's going to give way, and let me drop!" wailed the terrified boy.

"It'll do that all the sooner if you keep moving as you are," Hugh told him sharply, with the tone of authority that one accustomed to command might use. "I'm coming down after you, so don't be afraid. Can you hold on just ten seconds more?"

"I'll try to, but, oh! hurry, please!" came the trembling answer.

Already Hugh was passing over the edge. He

took care not to make a false movement, for the precipice was all of forty feet in depth, and a fall on the rocks below was bound to be a serious matter.

To lower himself to where the imperiled boy clung he had to take advantage of numerous projecting points of rock that offered him a foothold, or a place where he could hang on with his hands. Hugh was as nimble as any boy in Scranton, which fact proved of great advantage to him just then. Had it been otherwise, he might have himself fallen, and there would then have been a double tragedy.

Somehow, through Hugh's mind flashed the memory of how Claude's doting mother had always, on every occasion, condemned all athletic exercises that were intended to build up the muscles, and give new power to the body. It seemed the irony of fate that the life of her precious boy was now going to hang upon the ability of Hugh Morgan to sustain himself, and the weight of another, there upon the face of that rocky precipice! Perhaps in times to come Mrs. Jardine would discover how false her ideas were, and experience a radical change of heart. The opportunity which Hugh had once sighed for had come to him in a most wonderful way.

He succeeded in making his way down in safety, though once he slipped, and had a thrill of alarm pass over him. Now he found himself alongside Claude. The boy's face was the color of ashes;

Hugh had never looked upon a corpse in all his life, but he could not help comparing Claude's pallid countenance to one.

He was glancing around with the eye of a general who lets nothing, no matter how trivial, escape him. Just a foot below Claude's dangling toes there was a narrow ledge. If only both of them could find lodgment upon this, and have some hold above for their hands, they might maintain their position until Hugh's shouts attracted "Just" Smith to the spot, and he could do something to aid them.

"Listen, Claude," he said earnestly. "There's a way to save you, if only you keep your head about you. 'Just' Smith is coming along the road, and I'll shout out to guide him here so he can help us."

"But—the bush is going to give way right off!" gasped the terrified boy.

"Well, below us there's a ledge where we must plant our feet, and hold on," continued Hugh, convincingly. "I'm going to drop down to it now. Then you must try to lower yourself along the bush, inch by inch, until you feel the ledge under you. Don't be afraid, because I mean to grab hold of you; but when you feel me touching you, above all things don't let go above, or you'll throw us both down. Now, be ready, Claude; and, remember, it's going to be all right. Keep cool!"

Of course, Hugh only said that last to reassure the poor chap. Claude was already cold with

fear, as cold as an icicle, in fact; and quaking with fear in the bargain.

It was easy enough for Hugh to drop down another foot or so, until he felt the solid little ledge under him. Indeed, had it been necessary, such an agile fellow very likely might have continued all the way down to the base of the precipice.

His next move was to find a firm hold for his left hand, to which he could continue to cling while he sustained much of the weight of the other boy, after the weakened roots of the bush gave way entirely.

Claude was trying to do what he had been told, though in rather a bungling fashion. Inch by inch he allowed the bush to slip through his hands, looking down as well as he was able at the same time, in order to ascertain just how near he might be to that same ledge Hugh had told him of.

CHAPTER XI

THE CRISIS IN CLAUDE'S LIFE

Hugh kept a watchful eye on that bush. He knew it was going to give way presently, when, unless Claude had managed to secure a fresh grip on some object with his poor scratched hands, he was likely to be dashed downward.

Fortune was, however, kind in that respect, for there chanced to be a nice projection of rock, somewhat in the shape of a horn, just in the right place for Claude to seize upon, and which would help sustain his weight. Hugh knew very well, though, that most of the burden would fall upon him; and he, therefore, prepared to accept it.

"Here, reach out with your left hand, Claude, and take hold of this rock. Your feet are both safely anchored on the ledge. Keep up your grit, and everything will be all right yet. Do you understand what I'm telling you, Claude?"

"Yes, I do, Hugh," chattered the other, for his teeth were rattling together in a way that reminded Hugh of the "Bones" at the end of a minstrel line; if he had ever seen a Spanish stage performance he would have said they made a sound

like castanets in the hands of the senorita who gave the national Castilian dance.

Claude really managed to carry out that part of the task with a fair amount of success. His other hand still gripped the bush, which continued to gradually give way under the long and severe strain.

Hugh braced himself. He had taken as firm a hold as was possible, and had his other arm thrown around Claude.

"Steady, now, Claude, it's almost gone. When you feel it give way, try and make use of your right hand to find some other rocky point where you can hold on. I think there's one such on the other side of you. Above all, don't struggle, or you may throw me off my balance, and then it's good-bye to both of us. Now, be ready!"

Hugh's calculations proved to be correct, for the bush gave way, and fell with a clatter of small stones and loosened earth, down toward the bottom of the steep declivity. Claude uttered a cry of dismay when he felt his support gone; but luckily he gripped the rocky knob with his left hand more convulsively than ever, while Hugh sustained him to the best of his ability.

"That was well done, Claude," Hugh now told him, his main object being to put a little more confidence in the other boy, and thus lighten his own load. "We'll manage to cling here for a bit longer. When I think 'Just' Smith is getting

near by I'll let out a whoop that is bound to fetch him to our assistance."

One, two, three minutes passed. It was very trying to Hugh, and already his muscles began to feel the undue strain keenly. But he gritted his teeth, and waited, as it would be only a waste of breath and energy to shout before the next runner was close enough up to locate the sound.

Claude was shivering as though he would shake to pieces. He had received a dreadful fright, for a fact, and it was having its due effect upon his never strong frame. What would his doting mamma think, and say, Hugh told himself, almost with a chuckle of amusement, could she see her darling then and there, and realize how his very life depended upon the strong muscles and will to do things that Hugh Morgan had developed in himself?

How slowly the seconds passed! Hugh was trying to count, so as to judge when the Marathon runner would be likely to have covered that half-mile, and be at the spot where he, Hugh, had left the road.

When, finally, the time had expired he again spoke to Claude.

"Don't be startled, Claude, because I'm going to shout out. Hang tight, now!"

With that he sent out a whoop, and coupled it with the name of "Just" Smith. There was no immediate response, but then Hugh had already discounted this in his mind, remembering how he

also had come to a sudden stop, and listened as though unable to believe his ears.

Again he shouted, and once more uttered the name of the other boy. This time there came a speedy reply.

"Hello! that you, Hugh?"

"Yes, and I want help right away!" answered the boy who clung there with a burden on his hands. "Turn out of the road to the left, and hurry here. I'm down a precipice, Just. Keep coming, and I'll guide you all right."

So Hugh continued to utter loud shouts every dozen seconds or so. He could catch the calls of the advancing runner, and knew from their increasing loudness that he was gradually getting closer.

Then, looking up, he saw a head projected over the brink above. He could easily understand how "Just" Smith's eyes must have almost started from their sockets when discovering the dreadful position of the pair below; and especially after he had recognized Claude Jardine, the last fellow in the wide world whom he would have expected to see in such a fix.

"H-h-how in the wide world did you get down there, Hugh?" gasped the boy who leaned over the brink.

"I came down after Claude here, who'd fallen over, and was hanging to a bush that was giving way," explained Hugh. "And now it's up to you to get us both out of this scrape, Just."

"Oh, if only I had a rope!" cried the other, apparently nonplussed.

"Well, wishes won't make one," said the practical Hugh; "and so we'll have to do without. But if you look around sharply I think you'll find a long pole there, for I remember noticing something of the kind."

The boy above vanished for a brief period, which seemed ages to the anxious Claude; and even Hugh counted the seconds, for the strain was something serious. Then again that friendly head appeared in view.

"You were right, Hugh!" called the Smith boy; "there was such a pole handy, and I've got the same right here now. It's plenty long enough to reach down to you; but I'm wondering however I'll be able to draw two of you up."

"I don't expect you to, all by yourself, Just," Huge told him. "Poke the end of it down here, and keep a good stiff grip on the butt. Then we'll hold on, and find places to set our feet. Inch by inch, and foot by foot, we'll manage to climb up. You can help a little by keeping the stick coming, you know."

"I get you, Hugh!" snapped the other eagerly; "and it's sure a right good scheme. But be mighty careful you don't slip, either of you. That fall'd break bones, even if it didn't kill you outright."

"Don't worry about us, Just Smith; pay attention to your part of the contract, and things are

bound to work out first-class. Lower away, and don't poke us off our perch, please. We've only got a risky hold below here."

So saying, Hugh encouraged the other two to do their part manfully. Even Claude was shivering less than before, as though a breath of renewed confidence might have been installed in his heart by this close contact with such a stalwart chap as Hugh Morgan. It was going to be the turning point in Claude's career, of that Hugh felt positive. After this thrilling experience he was bound to awaken to the fact that he was not like other boys of his age; and demand of his mother that she permit him to participate in the life-giving outdoor sports that are a part and parcel of boy nature.

They began to climb. It was slow work, but Hugh would not be hurried. Better that they waste time in gaining each foot than by an unwise step ruin all. What matter if that arm of his was almost numb with pain, and he had to press his teeth firmly together in order to continue to hold up Claude? If only the other had been a normal boy he could have helped himself wonderfully; but, as it was, he seemed as weak and helpless as a kitten that had never opened its eyes as yet.

Well, half of the distance separating them from the top had been safely navigated, and so far no accident had occurred. Hugh kept encouraging his charge from time to time; and then speaking

words also to the laboring, anxious boy above, directing him just how to proceed.

Finally they reached the top. Hugh still ordered "Just" Smith to hold the pole as he had been doing. Then he managed to push Claude up so that he could crawl over the edge, which the other did in a speedy manner, bordering on the ludicrous.

Then, to the surprise, as well as delight of Hugh, what did Claude do but turn and stretch out a helping hand, as though his first thought was to assist his rescuer to top the rise; indeed, Hugh's one arm was so utterly gone that he could hardly count on it for a single thing. Hugh would not be apt to forget this action on the part of the "sissy"; it proved what he had all along more than half suspected, that Claude really did have the making of a genuine boy in him, given half a chance for it to show itself, and the seed to germinate. And Hugh determined that he would make it his particular business to see that there came a change in Claude's dreary life. His mother could hardly refuse anything asked by the one to whom she owed the life of her son.

Soon the trio lay upon the ground, breathing hard, and trying to talk at the same time. Both Hugh and "Just" Smith were consumed with curiosity to know how Claude happened to get into such a strange predicament, and he hastened to explain.

After all, there was nothing so very singular

about it. His mother had stopped in to see an old nurse, who had been in the family many years but was at the time lying sick at her sister's place. Something influenced Claude to get out of the big car to take a little stroll. Perhaps the sight of all those happy lads running and jumping and throwing weights had made him feel more than ever his own narrow, confined life, kept out of the society of all the other boys after school hours, and made to play the part of a "mollycoddle," as Roosevelt called all such fellows who have never learned how to take care of themselves when a bully threatens.

Unused to the woods and hills, of course the first thing Claude did was to lose all sense of direction. He became alarmed, and that made matters worse than ever. So he had roamed about for almost a full hour, dreadfully tiring his poor feet and limbs, since he had never before in all his life walked so far and done such vigorous climbing.

Then he had come to that precipice, and, thinking he might glimpse the cottage where the old nurse lived, somewhere down in the valley, he had incautiously crept too close to the brink, when his weight caused a portion of the soil to give way. Finding himself falling, Claude had clutched desperately around him, and, as it happened, his fingers gripped a friendly bush, to which he continued to cling even as he struggled to better his condition and shouted as best he was able.

Hugh finished the story, to the edification of "Just" Smith, who admitted that if it had not been for the courage and muscular ability of Hugh the other boy must long ago have fallen to the bottom of the awful precipice. And Claude, shivering as he afterwards looked up at the forty feet and more of rocky wall, vowed he would never rest satisfied until he too had learned how to develop his muscles so that if ever again caught in a similar scrape he might have a fighting chance for his life.

The two boys eventually found the cottage, although Mrs. Jardine and the car had gone down the road hoping to overtake Claude, though they were expected back again later; so, leaving Claude there, Hugh and "Just" Smith continued their seven-mile run.

CHAPTER XII

STARTLING NEWS FROM THE JUGGINS BOY

"Burr-r-r-r!"

That was the telephone bell ringing.

"Hugh, will you answer it, since the chances are the call is from some one of your numerous boy chums?" the voice of Mrs. Morgan came from the dining-room, where she was looking after the silver and china, after washing up the supper dishes, for they temporarily chanced to be without a hired-girl.

Hugh guessed as much himself. He had already been called to the 'phone several times since arriving home after his seven-mile spin. Once it had been Claude's mother, begging him to be sure and call at her house early in the morning, because she wanted to have a good, long, earnest talk with him about Claude's future; and also to let him know how brimful of gratitude a mother's heart could be toward the brave boy who, at the risk of his own life, had saved her only child for her.

Hugh had promised he would see her, although he expected to be very busy on the morning of

the athletic tournament and then expresed the hope that Claude and herself would honor the tournament with their presence. This she hastily assured him she meant to do, because it was now borne in on her heart that she had been making a terrible mistake in reference to the way she was bringing up her darling Claude.

Needless to say, Hugh had chuckled joyously after that little talk. He guessed he would have little trouble now in removing the scales Mrs. Jardine had allowed to cover her eyes with regard to the benefits to be derived by any boy, no matter how weak he might be, through a *judicious* system of athletic exercises, the same to be lengthened as he gradually grew more capable of standing fatigue.

"Hello!" Hugh called.

A voice he immediately recognized as that of Horatio Juggins greeted him. "That you, Hugh?"

"Just who it is; what's the matter, Horatio? Feeling the effects of your little jog this afternoon? I hope not, for your sake, to-morrow."

"Oh! come off, Hugh," the other quickly replied. "I'd be a fine candidate for a fifteen-mile Marathan race, wouldn't I, if seven miles knocked me out? I'm as fit right now as a fiddle. But Hugh, can you come right over here now? Something dreadful has happened."

Hugh had a chilly feeling pass over him. It seemed as though some sort of bad news was

coming. Had the great meet been called off, for some unknown reason or other? Somehow that struck him first as a dire possibility, since it would grievously disappoint thousands of eager boys and girls, not to mention many older folks with young hearts.

Now Hugh had intended to take that evening quietly, resting after his strenuous afternoon, and absolutely refuse to allow Thad, or any other fellow, to coax him outside the door. But already this resolve began to weaken. That dim mention of some possible tragedy happening started him going.

"Of course I can come over, Horatio," he told the boy at the other end of the wire; "and I'll do so right away on condition that it's no joke. Tell me what's up first."

"Oh! I meant to do that, Hugh," his friend hastened to say, and Hugh could detect a tremor to the boyish voice that told of excitement. "You see, it's K. K."

"What's happened to him?" demanded Hugh, his mind instantly suggesting all manner of terrible possibilities, from a sudden attack of sickness to an accident whereby his life might be in danger; for with boys these things sometimes happen as unexpectedly as a flash of lightning from a clear sky.

"Why, he never came back again from that run this afternoon, Hugh!" Horatio was saying, in an awed tone now.

"What's that you're telling me?" exclaimed the astonished Hugh. "I thought I saw K. K. with some of the other fellows when I was starting home just before dusk came on, though, of course, I may have been mistaken about it."

"You were, Hugh, you certainly were," Horatio assured him in a softened tone. "His own mother ought to know, hadn't she? Well, she's over here at our house right now, crying her eyes out, and imagining all sorts of terrible things. You remember the Kinkaids live close by us; and she knew her boy was going to take the run this afternoon along with me, so she thought I could tell her if anything had happened to detain him. Why, she says K. K. never missed his supper before in all his life. It'd have to be something *fierce* to keep him away from his best meal of the whole day."

Hugh was thinking swiftly. He realized that this was no little matter to be dismissed as unimportant. Something certainly must have happened to detain K. K. for all this time. Several hours had elapsed since the other fellows reached the terminus of the long run at the athletic grounds. Why then had not K. K. shown up?

"Keep the rest till I get there, Horatio!" he told the other.

"Then you're sure coming, are you, Hugh?"

"Right away," Hugh added.

"Well, I'm glad, because you'll know what to

do about it. And there's something else!"

"Yes?"

"I've got something to tell you that, say, I didn't have the heart to explain to K. K.'s mother, because she's bad enough frightened as it is; but it's looking particularly ugly to me, now that he hasn't come back. Oh! perhaps there is more'n a grain of truth in all those terrible stories those hayseeds tell about that place!"

Hugh put up the receiver with a bang, made a dash for his cap, slipped on his sweater, for he knew the night air was cold, and then shot out of doors. Somehow those last few words of Horatio, breathing of mystery as they did, had excited his curiosity until it now reached fever-pitch.

As he knew of several short-cuts across lots it took him but a few minutes to arrive at the Juggins home. Horatio was waiting at the door, and must have heard him running up the steps, for he instantly opened it to admit him.

"Gee, but I'm glad you've come, Hugh!" was his greeting. "She's in there with mother, and taking on awful about it. It's a dreadful thing to see a woman cry, Hugh. And I'm afraid there may be a good reason for expecting the worst."

"Tell me what you've got up your sleeve, Horatio," snapped Hugh, "and quit giving all these dark hints. You know something connected with K. K. that perhaps no one else does."

"Guess I do, Hugh; for he confided in me, and told me not to say anything to the rest. Oh, how

foolish it was for K. K. to think he could do that big job two days in succession; but he said he was feeling equal to nearly anything; and just *had* to make the try, since the notion had gripped him. But come on over to my den, Hugh, and I'll tell you all about it. Then you must decide what's best to be done; and say, I hope you can soothe Mrs. Kinkaid a bit in the bargain."

Ten seconds later and the two boys found themselves ensconced in the room Horatio called his "den," although it was also his sleeping apartment. But he had fixed it as near like a boy's ideal of a lounging-place could be, the walls carrying the customary college pennants and a great variety of other things besides that gave them a rather crowded appearance. Evidently Horatio believed it added to the charm, for he never entered that "sanctum" without an involuntary smile of appreciation.

Horatio closed the door softly after him. Hugh had also noticed how he did this just as carefully when admitting him to the front hall; and as though he expected that this must have aroused a certain amount of curiosity, Horatio hastened to explain.

"You see, the poor woman is so excited, and in such a nervous condition, that she jumps up at the sound of a door closing, and starts to rush out into the hall, believing that Justin has got back home and hurried over to acquaint her with the joyous fact. Each time her disappointment

leaves her worse than before. She will be needing Doctor Cadmus if this keeps on, as sure as anything."

"Well, what is it you want to tell me, Horatio?" demanded Hugh, not even taking the trouble to drop down into the chair the owner of the "den" shoved toward him; for it seemed as though he must soon be on the jump—there was evidently something hanging over their heads, which would be needing prompt attention.

"Why, it's just this, Hugh," began the other. "K. K. took a foolish notion he'd like to say he'd gone over the full course just for practice. And, Hugh, he told me he meant to make use of the short-cut that crosses the old haunted quarry!"

Hugh started, and looked serious.

"Then, if anything has happened to K. K., it must have been while he was crossing that mile tract between the two main roads," he went on to say, without hesitation. Horatio nodded his head eagerly.

"I jumped to that same conclusion, Hugh, only I didn't dare mention it to Mrs. Kinkaid. I thought you ought to know first of all, and decide on the program. It's terrible just to think of it; and K. K. actually pretended to make light, too, of all those stories the farmers have been telling about that awful place."

"Hold your horses, Horatio!" Hugh exclaimed. "When I said that I wasn't thinking of ghosts, or anything else unnatural. I meant that

in all probability poor K. K. met with some ordinary accident while on that stretch, and has been unable to continue his run. He may have tripped on a vine he failed to see, and either broken his leg, or else sprained his ankle so badly that he can't even limp along. I've known such a thing to happen—in fact, once I got myself in the same pickle, and had to *crawl* two miles to a house, every foot of the way on hands and knees, because the pain was frightful whenever I tried to stand up. Well, the chances are K. K. has had such a thing befall him."

Horatio heaved a tremendous sigh, as though quite a weighty load had been taken off his chest.

"You make me feel a heap better, Hugh, when you're so positive," he hastened to admit. "I was afraid it might be something even worse than a sprain; but never mind what I thought. The question now is, what ought we do about it?"

"There's only one thing that can be done," Hugh told him in his customary straight-from-the-shoulder fashion, "which is for some of his chums to organize a searching party, get the old Kinkaid car out, and go up there to look over that abandoned road from one end to the other. We'll find K. K., or know the reason why."

"That sounds good to me, Hugh!" declared Horatio, always ready to follow where a bold leader showed the way; "and perhaps we may have an opportunity to discover whether there *is*

any truth about those queer happenings the farmers keep telling of whenever the old quarry is mentioned in their presence."

"We'll not bother our minds about fairy stories," Hugh assured him. "What we're meaning to do is to look for a practical explanation of K. K.'s holding out. And, mark my words, the chances are ten to one we'll find the poor chap groaning alongside that road somewhere. But let's get busy now, Horatio!"

CHAPTER XIII

TO THE RESCUE OF "K. K."

Hugh would really have been better satisfied if he could have hurried away without seeing K. K.'s mother. He feared that she might delay progress more or less, and at such a time every minute counted.

But at the same time he realized that the poor lady was in a dreadful state of mind. It was necessary then that he try and soothe her anxiety, for, as Horatio knew very well, Hugh Morgan had a way of making other people feel the utmost confidence in him.

"Well, let's see K. K.'s mother, Horatio; but we mustn't waste much time. We'll have to get her permission to run the car. I only hope there's a decent supply of gas aboard, or in the garage."

Accordingly, Horatio led him into another room, where they found Mrs. Kinkaid in a dreadfully nervous condition. She jumped to her feet on discovering that Horatio had another boy with him, and then upon seeing that it was not the one her heart was yearning after she uttered a pitiful wail, and fell back into her chair again.

Hugh wasted no time, but commenced telling her something of what he had heard from Horatio, connected with K. K.'s foolish determination to take in the entire course as though in the race.

"Of a certainty he's fallen and sprained an ankle somewhere along that cross-country road, Mrs. Kinkaid," he ended with. "We mean to gather a few of the fellows, and if you'll give us permission to use your big car we intend to run up there and look that road over from end to end. There is no doubt but what we'll find K. K. and fetch him back with us. So please try and feel that things will turn out all right. Make up your mind we won't come back without him, that's all there is to it."

Somehow the very confidence shown in Hugh's words seemed to pass along to the almost distracted lady. Her eyes lighted up with renewed courage, and she even smiled, though wanly, it must be confessed. But then Hugh was pretty much of a magician in regard to arousing a feeling of hope in the most depressed mind.

"You are a thousand times welcome to the car," she hurriedly assured him; "and anything else you might want. It is dreadfully unfortunate Mr. Kinkaid is away on one of his usual business trips to the west, or he would insist on going with you. But I feel certain, Hugh, you will manage things splendidly, and a mother's prayers will go after you, that you may not only

find my boy, but that he may not have been seriously injured."

"Then we'll not linger any longer, ma'am," said Hugh, eager to be on the move.

Horatio wrapped himself up warmly, and the two of them shot out of the door.

"Now, what first, Hugh?"

Hugh seemed to have mapped out a plan of campaign in his mind, for he answered without hesitation.

"We must pick up several of the fellows—Thad for one, then Owen Dugdale would be another good hand at hunting for a lost party; and, well, Julius Hobson for the third. That will make five in all,—enough to search the quarry road from end to end. Besides, we ought to carry several lanterns, because, while there is a moon, I reckon we'll find it far from light along that overgrown trail."

"You just think of everything, Hugh," remarked Horatio, wonderingly.

"Let's get the car, first of all," Hugh continued shrewdly, "because it can save us many steps in picking up the other fellows."

By this time they were at the Kinkaid home. Horatio was well acquainted with the premises, as he had played with K. K. since they were small boys together. Hugh had been told where the key of the garage was hidden, and quickly discovered it hanging on a concealed nail.

"Wait till I throw the switch, and light up,"

said Horatio, for they had electricity at the Kinkaid place, and, of course, a bulb lighted in the garage was considered much safer than a lantern.

As soon as the illumination came both boys set about examining the big touring car that occupied the garage.

"Bully!" ejaculated Horatio, after making the rounds with suspended breath; "all the tires are as hard as anything. How about the supply of gas, Hugh?" for his companion had occupied himself with making an examination of the tank.

"Plenty to carry us up and back twice over!" cried the delighted Hugh. "This is what I call great luck. I was afraid there would be a tire that needed changing; or else no gasolene at all. K. K. didn't realize how kind he was to himself when he fitted up the old car so handsomely, for some purpose."

"Oh!" chuckled Horatio, "mebbe I know why. You see, there's going to be another barn dance next Tuesday night up at Bailey's, and I think K. K. asked a girl to go with him and Peggy Noland and Owen Dugdale. Yes, he even told me there was still room for two more, if I could coax somebody to keep me company."

Hugh busied himself in starting the car going. He knew considerable about mechanics, as most boys of the present generation do, since automobiles have become so very common. Running it out of the garage Hugh bade Horatio "hop

aboard," which that worthy did without a second invitation.

"Better get Thad first of all, I reckon," suggested Hugh, as though he might even have figured out how best to save themselves from any unnecessary delay; "then we can clip around to Julius Hobson's place, and pick up Owen last on our way out of town."

The program suited Horatio first class. Indeed, he had such perfect confidence in Hugh that anything the other said carried conviction along with it. It is a fine thing for any boy to have aroused such a spirit of trust in the minds of his comrades that they look up to him as a sort of natural leader, and obey his slightest wish without hesitation. But Hugh bore his honors with humility, and never attempted to display the attributes of a czar.

Great was the astonishment of Thad Stevens when he found two excited fellows demanding that he bundle up and go with them for a night ride up to the abandoned quarry that had gained such a bad reputation among the country folks residing roundabout.

The story was partly told in rapid-fire style, enough of it, at least, to cause Thad to bounce into his heavy coat, and provide himself with a lantern. He expected to become better informed from time to time as they pushed along the road.

Next came Julius Hobson. They found him at home also, and, of course, he was duly worked

up on hearing how poor K. K. had never returned home from his run over the long course of fifteen miles. When he heard that they needed lanterns Julius produced a new electric flashlight which he had received for a birthday present, and Hugh said it would do very well as an additional means of illumination.

Last of all they stopped at the home of Owen Dugdale, the dark-faced lad who lived with his grandfather in a big house, and about whom there had at one time been quite a little halo of mystery hanging.*

Again was the main fact mentioned concerning the necessity for a searching party starting forth to find poor K. K. Owen did not have to be urged to join the bunch; indeed, he showed himself eager to accompany them.

"I can fetch a lantern, if you want me to, Hugh," he observed; "and say, do you know I'm of a mind to carry my new shotgun that I had given to me just last month, when Grandfather concluded I was old enough to want to go hunting. If we have to chase all around through that place there's so many queer stories told about we might as well be fixed so as to protect ourselves."

"Huh!" snorted Horatio Juggins, skeptically, "I've always heard that ghosts don't mind ordinary birdshot any more'n an alligator would. But then fetch it along, Owen; it'll no doubt make

* "The Chums of Scranton High on Deck."

us feel a little better when we find ourselves up in that terribly lonely tract of country. And who knows but what there might be a stray wildcat abroad in those woods. Such things have been heard of, and I even saw the skin of a whopper shown in the market."

So Owen carried out his design, and when he got aboard the big car he took with him not only a lantern, well filled with oil, but also his brand new twelve-gauge shotgun.

At last they were off. Every fellow felt a peculiar sense of exhilaration that possibly even bordered on anticipation, take possession of him; for the future was there before them all unknown. Who could say what strange adventures might befall them before this undertaking was finished?

Of course they had the headlights turned on at full force, and Hugh at the wheel found no difficulty in keeping the middle of the road. He did not mean to pursue a reckless pace, because, if they met with an accident it would spoil all their plans. Better to go at an ordinary rate of speed, and make haste slowly, so to speak.

Meanwhile there was a clatter of tongues aboard the big car. Julius, Thad and Owen had dozens of pertinent questions ready to fire at Horatio, who was kept busy making illuminating replies. Thus the trio learned how K. K. had unwisely determined to cover the entire course and only whispered his intention to his chum,

Horatio, at the same time binding him to silence, for fear lest Mr. Leonard put a damper on his plans by vetoing the scheme in the start.

Then suggestions began to flow like water after a storm. All sorts of possibilities covering such a strange disappearance were advanced. Owen believed that Horatio was not far amiss when he declared there might be something in that ghost business, after all; and that poor K. K. had found it out to his cost; though, beyond this broad statement, Owen declined to commit himself, because he, of course, could not imagine what a genuine ghost would look like, in the daytime at that; or what such an apparition would be likely to do to a boy who had had the ill-luck to fall into *Its* clutches.

A dozen additional ideas were advanced, some of them bordering on the absurd and others really plausible. The unlimited resources of a boy's fertile mind in conjuring up remarkable explanations in a mysterious case like the one now engaging their attention had not yet been reached at the time Hugh suddenly announced they were close to the place where the abandoned quarry road started in from the thoroughfare they were then following.

"We just passed the twin oaks I remember stood alongside the road on the left," he explained, at the same time slowing up considerably; "and they are close to the turning-in place. I noticed them in particular, you see, because I

didn't want to lose even three seconds when on the run, in searching for some sign of the spot; though, of course, I could have looked for the marks of our tires left there at the time we came back from our nutting excursion, and went through to the other road. Yes, here we are right now, and I'm going to turn in, boys."

He negotiated the turn without accident, though the branches of the trees did scrape against the sides of the car in a way that made some of the occupants shudder; for already they were beginning to feel a trace of the uneasiness that their gruesome surroundings were apt to arouse within their boyish hearts.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SEARCHING PARTY

"Hugh, it looks like we mightn't need those lanterns after all," remarked Horatio, after they had gotten well started along the dimly seen quarry road.

Indeed, the brilliant headlights of the big car illuminated a radius of considerable size ahead of them and around. Every tiny twig was thrown out into bold relief, as though a powerful sun had found a way of forcing ingress through the canopy of leafless branches overhead.

"Not just at present, perhaps," replied the driver at the wheel; "but they may come in handy yet. We'll wait and see."

Owen sat beside Hugh, the other three occupying the tonneau of the car. There was abundance of room for all, and some to spare. Owen held his new shotgun in his hands and he kept a close watch upon the road ahead, just as though that idea connected with a ferocious wildcat might have taken hold on his mind, and he believed there was a possibility of such a thing coming to pass.

Hugh drove with exceedingly great care, and

made no attempt at speed. Indeed, such a thing was utterly out of the question, with that rough road to follow and the necessity of keeping a constant vigilant outlook, lest they collide with some tree. When the quarry was in full operation automobiles were an unknown luxury; and certainly no provision had ever been made for such a contraption passing along that crooked trail, with its numerous sharp curves intended to avoid natural obstacles. Three separate times already had Hugh brought the car to a full stop, and even caused the engine to cease its throbbing. This was done in order that all of them might strain their hearing, in hopes of catching some faint sound to tell that the missing boy whom they sought was close at hand.

But only disappointment succeeded each attempt to pick up information. They caught the dismal hooting of an owl in some dead tree not far away, but certainly such a doleful sound did not raise their spirits materially. Several times while they were moving along Owen had seen a movement amidst the brush that gave him a little thrill; but the glimpses he obtained of the disappearing animal convinced him in one instance that it was a red fox that scurried off in alarm; while on the second occasion he rather imagined it was only a ring-tailed raccoon scuttling away and badly frightened by the intense white glow that had suddenly penetrated his dark quarters.

If there was a wildcat within twenty miles of

the spot they certainly never knew of it, because no such beast of prey disclosed its presence to them while they continued on their way.

But then there were plenty of thrills for the boys. Not only did the weird hooting of that horned owl come to make their flesh creep, but now and again they detected strange sounds that may have been caused by limbs of the trees rubbing together in the night breeze, but which had a wonderful resemblance to human groans.

They had been pursuing their way along for some little time without much attempt at conversation; but it is pretty hard for a parcel of boys to remain long silent, no matter what the provocation. And Horatio, for one, felt urged to free his mind of certain fancies that had taken lodging there.

"I say, fellows, doesn't this beat everything you ever saw all hollow?" he went on to say, for there was really no need of their keeping quiet, since they had not started out to steal a march upon any enemy,—only to find poor lost K. K. "Just listen to that awful groaning sound, will you? If I didn't know it was caused by the limbs of trees sawing across each other in the wind I'd think somebody was almost dying."

"At another time I guess we wouldn't bother our heads about such a silly thing," observed Julius Hobson; "but, of course, our minds are full up with what may have happened to our com-

rade, and all that noise makes us shiver a heap; it's so suggestive, so to speak."

"Oh! what did you think you saw then, Owen?" gasped Horatio, as, chancing to fix his gaze on the other, he noticed him suddenly elevate his gun, as though tempted to shoot the same.

Owen chuckled.

"It was only a frisky rabbit, after all," he announced calmly enough. "I was just covering him to find out how easy I could nail the rascal, if only I was out hunting game instead of a lost boy. And we'd have had rabbit stew at the Dugdale home to-morrow, let me tell you, Horatio, if I'd cared to let fly, for I had him covered handsomely."

"Well, please don't do it in a hurry again, Owen," asked Horatio, settling back once more, and hoping his throbbing heart might not beat so loudly that any of his comrades could hear it pounding against his ribs. "Remember this is no ordinary patch of woods we're in right now. All sorts of stories have been told concerning the country up here; and in passing through after nightfall we're doing what a big bribe couldn't tempt any farmer's help to try. But, Hugh, don't you think we must be getting pretty near that place by this time?"

"Just about two-thirds of the way, Horatio," he was informed. "That leaning tree we passed is exactly three hundred and thirty-seven paces from the place we left the road."

"Well, what do you think of that for looking ahead, fellows!" ejaculated Horatio. "Hugh here took all the trouble to count the steps while passing through, the day he came up to examine the ground. That's what I call preparedness, and I guess it counts in a race, just as much as in getting ready for war."

Hugh laughed as though momentarily amused.

"Well, they're both in the same category, Horatio, if you look at things from the right point of view; rival armies and rival athletes contending for the prize which in both cases would mean victory. Looking ahead is a useful hobby, and it's served me handsomely on many an occasion. I consider no time wasted that is employed to insure success; even if you never need the information you've picked up it adds to your stock of knowledge; and no fellow can have too big a fund of that."

"Then we ought soon to be getting there, at this rate," continued Horatio. "Let's hope nothing happens to our old car. We'd have a jolly walk back to town if we broke down here and couldn't fix things. I'd prefer making a fire and spending the night in the woods to taking such a tramp, which would debar us from all hope of making that big run to-morrow."

"With K. K. out of the game the chances for Scranton High begin to flicker some," admitted Julius. "He was showing unusual stamina right now, and secretly I was backing K. K. to bring

home the bacon for our school. Of course, with Hugh and Horatio and 'Just' Smith still in the ring it isn't hopeless by any means; but they do say those Allandale chaps have unearthed several wonders at long-distance running, and they are dying to knock Scranton down this time."

Again Hugh stopped the car and bade the others listen.

"It isn't that I thought I heard anything suspicious, fellows," he went on to explain, when they manifested a certain amount of excitement; "but, on general principles, I think we ought to stop oftener, and find out if there's anything doing."

After testing their combined hearing to the limit, and without any success, Hugh again started up. It was Thad who spoke next, and apparently he had been considering something that he would like to have made clear.

"What if we pass all the way through to the other road, without learning a single thing, Hugh?" he went on to say; "do you mean to give it up, and head for home then and there?"

"Well, I should hope not, Thad!" burst out Horatio; "we're none of us built that way. Because a fellow gets a single knock-down in a fight ought he to throw up the sponge right away, and own himself beaten? Why, we started out to find K. K., and sleep isn't going to visit my eyes this night until we succeed. That's the way I look at it, and I reckon the rest of you are in the same boat."

"If such a thing should happen, Thad," said Hugh, sturdily, "we'll simply turn around and come back again; only, under the new conditions, some of you will have to turn out with the lanterns, and search alongside the road as we go slowly along."

Horatio gave a gasp that was plainly audible.

"Do you really mean, Hugh," he went on to ask, in a voice that trembled more or less despite Horatio's effort to control the same, "that you half expect to find K. K. lying alongside the road, either dead, or else insensible from the pain of his broken leg?"

"Well, I wasn't just thinking things would be as bad as all that," Hugh hastened to say. "What I had in mind was the chance of coming on his footprints, and then trying to follow the same. We could easily tell them, for K. K. had on his running shoes, you remember. By tracking him, step by step, don't you see, we could tell just where he met with his trouble, even find out, perhaps, the nature of his accident, and continue to follow him up."

"That would suit me first rate," said Julius, promptly; "and my fine electric hand-torch might come into play with a vengeance. There's nothing better going for following a trail in the dark, because the light is focussed, you see, on a small compass. Why, you can pick up night-walkers like everything when the fishing season's on, by using a flashlight. I could even find a needle in

a haystack, I believe, with one of these jim-dandy contraptions."

"All right, Julius, we'll appoint you head tracker, then," chuckled Horatio. "But, after all, perhaps we'll run across our comrade yet, before we get out of this tangle. We're about to come to the most critical point of the entire trip, remember, for the old quarry is just ahead of us."

Horatio chanced to be on the side of the car toward the quarry. He was not spending nearly so much time now looking ahead, leaving that task to his chums; even while talking he kept his eyes fixed upon the dark expanse that represented the surrounding woods, anticipating catching a glimpse of something, he hardly knew what, at any moment now. Doubtless all those silly yarns retailed by the ignorant gossiping farm-hands in the market-place in Scranton, while they tried to outdo one another in matching fairy stories, must have been circulating through Horatio's brain just then. The heavy atmosphere of the deserted stone quarry, and its lonely surroundings, added to the mysterious disappearance of K. K., combined to make him peculiarly susceptible to such influences as see ghosts in every white object that moves in the darkness.

This being the case with the Juggins boy it was not to be wondered at that there could be traced a vein of actual gratification in his voice when he suddenly electrified his companions by exclaiming:

"Hugh! fellows, I tell you I saw it right then, just as that Swanson farmhand vowed to me he did once on a time this last summer—it was a light, waved up and down, back and forth, and just like they teach you when you join the Signal Corps, and learn how to wigwag with a flag or a lantern. It came from right over yonder, where we all know the old quarry lies! And I'm not fooling, either; cross my heart if I am!"

CHAPTER XV

PROWLING AROUND THE QUARRY

Everybody was staring hard by the time Horatio finished. Hugh, of course, had immediately stopped the car on the road, so that they were now stationary.

It chanced that the spot was one of few where a glimpse of the quarry could be picked up, as the boys had discovered at the time they passed along this way, when we overtook them on their nutting trip.

Seconds crept past.

Each boy could measure time by the beating of his wildly accelerated heart, and as these were throbbing at the rate of something like a hundred pulsations per minute it can be easily understood that "things were going some," to quote Horatio, when afterwards telling the story.

Then all of them saw what the first discoverer had attempted to describe. They stared as though fascinated. Truly Horatio had said well when he spoke of the odd movements of the mysterious light; for it moved swiftly up and down, then sideways, and in eccentric circles, after

which it vanished as suddenly as it had come into being.

Some of the boys sighed, as though being wakened from a dream. Horatio, of course, was full of deepest gratification, since he had detected a skeptical air in the actions of Thad and Owen, which seemed to place him in the light of one who "saw things where none existed."

"There, didn't I tell you?" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "And, say, wasn't that—eh, party, whoever he might be, making some sort of telegraphic signals with his old lantern or torch?"

"Hugh, what do you think?" demanded Thad. "You're up in all that kind of wigwag signal work, and perhaps now you could tell what it means."

"I lost some of it, I'm sorry to say, fellows," observed Hugh, gravely; "but all the same I caught enough to tell me that waving of a light was meant as a signal message, though who sent it, and to whom, is all a mystery."

"But could you make out enough of the message, Hugh, to give you any idea what it stood for?" persisted Thad.

"Yes, I believe I did," the other admitted, solemnly, so that each of his chums bent closer to catch the next words that fell from his lips. "I'm certain it spelled out the word 'help,' for one; and I thought another was 'quick'!"

"Oh! what do you think of that?" gasped Horatio.

"The mystery deepens," added Owen, dramatically, just as he had probably been accustomed to reading in some story of excitement.

"Of course," continued Hugh, immediately, "we've got to take a look around that same old quarry, and see what's going on. Somebody's holding the fort there, even if it is said to be deserted. Who and what he can be, of course, remains to be seen; but I'm not taking a bit of stock in those old wives' yarns about a ghost, remember, Horatio."

"Then we'll have to leave the car on the road, won't we, Hugh, when we tackle this big job?" questioned Owen.

"Of course; and since I marked the best spot where anyone could make their way along to the face of the quarry, we must start up again, and keep moving till we strike that place."

"But, Hugh, do you think the—er—party making those signals with a light could have noticed our illumination, and that message was meant for us?" Horatio went on to ask, solicitously.

"I'm not prepared to say," he was told, "though I don't see how anybody with eyes could miss discovering us coming along. And, besides, the old car makes plenty of noise in the bargain, to attract attention. So it looks as if he did know, and was trying to talk to us."

All this only added to the thrill that was forever passing through each and every member of the night expedition. It would be manifestly im-

possible to describe their mixed feelings as they advanced slowly along the rough road so long abandoned to nature. A dozen times Horatio believed he heard cries; why, it seemed as though the air must be filled with uncanny sounds, for his lively imagination was working at race-horse speed just then.

The car stopped short.

"Wow! what's happened now, Hugh?" whispered Horatio.

"We've arrived at the getting-out place, that's all," came the steady reply, as the chauffeur caused the engine to cease working and then proceeded to leave his seat, after his companion had jumped out.

The lanterns were now lighted and the electric torch made ready for use. If hands trembled considerably during this operation, causing several matches to be used before the desired results were obtained, could anyone blame Owen and the other possessor of a lantern? It was a most remarkable thing that no one evinced the slightest disposition to stay by the car, and guard it against thieves. It was a case of "follow the leader," and where Hugh went they were all bound to go also. To be honest, the chances were that Horatio, for one, could not have been coaxed to separate himself from the company of his four chums; because there was a great deal of truth in that old maxim, "in union there is strength."

Hugh now led the way. He had been given

one of the lanterns with which to light a passage across the heaps of broken stones, earth, and rubbish, cast there at the time in the remote past when the quarry was in full blast, with workmen delving into the hillside, blasting away sections through the use of dynamite or powder, and sending out many wagon-loads of building-stone each of the six working days of the week.

They did not string out in single file, but kept bunched together. Indeed, this came through no accident, but there was a method in their madness; because, you see, no fellow would want to be the hindmost in the file.

Hugh showed a wonderful amount of knowledge of the place, considering that he had never before in his life placed a foot upon the ground and had to depend entirely on his former observations. But he kept on as straight as could be expected, and presently Owen managed to muster up courage enough to say in a low and most carefully guarded tone:

"Hugh, did you take note of the *exact* spot where the light showed up? I'm asking because you seem to be heading direct for somewhere."

"I believe I know where it was," Hugh told him simply. "You see, I noted several things about the face of the quarry that day we stopped to look it over; and when I saw that dancing trail of fire I figured out that it must be at just such a place, which spot I'm heading for right

now. And just as you spoke I had ample proof that I was right in my guess."

"Why, what happened, Hugh?" demanded Horatio eagerly.

"I caught a faint glimpse of light up there," Hugh told him. "I wonder none of the rest of you happened to notice the same. It made me think that some person might be in one of those holes we saw in the face of the wall—caves, the natives call them, Horatio says. As this was somewhat deep only a tiny bit of illumination escaped, and you could just detect that when at a certain angle. Stop short, now, and see for yourselves, for there it is again!"

Thrilled to the bone they stood and gaped. Hugh was pointing with his disengaged hand, half holding the lantern back of him so that its glow might not further interfere with their view.

"You're right, Hugh; that's surely what it is," agreed Thad, almost immediately; and each of the other three went on record with a corresponding affirmative.

"Then the next thing for us to do is to find some way of climbing up to that same fissure," the leader explained, showing that he meant to lose no time in trying to open negotiations with the unknown denizens of the quarry, whose actions were becoming more and more mysterious as time passed.

"Which means that we're going to beard the tiger in his den," quoth Owen, gripping his gun

more firmly as he edged a little closer to Hugh; for since he was the only member of the expedition who could be said to possess a weapon it was proper that he should be found in the van at such a crisis.

They walked on, not hastily, and showing no outward sign of the tumult that must have raged in each boyish heart. Now it was on longer possible for them to discern that faint glow; but such a little thing did not daunt them. Hugh had marked well the exact location of their objective point, and Hugh seldom made mistakes, those other confident fellows were telling themselves as they cheerfully trudged along.

The foot of the cliff was at hand. Rains and winds and snow avalanches had, during the years that had passed since the hands of men worked those diggings, served to cut loose great quantities of débris from the face of the height, so that here and there at the foot irregular pyramids of earth and rocks could be seen. Hugh now seemed to have turned his attention from above and was bending half over, as though examining the ground. Owen knew what this meant. The other anticipated finding a track leading directly to the route by means of which that cavern halfway up the cliff might be easiest attained.

And, as often happens, such reasoning proved to be the wisest thing the searchers could have undertaken, for hardly had half a minute elapsed

than Hugh was heard to give vent to a low ejaculation of gratification.

No one spoke, but they understood that he had found the trail he was looking for. Indeed, he at once started to move along, still bending over, and holding his lighted lantern low, so that its none too good illumination would best serve him.

Now they reached a sort of strange little gully, where the silt had washed down more heavily during the period of erosion than at any other place. Looking up, the boys could see that it afforded a steep but accessible avenue by means of which an agile person could ascend the otherwise impregnable height towering above their heads.

Hugh halted not, but started up. Owen came close behind him, holding that formidable shotgun so that he could thrust it ahead of his leader should an occasion arise necessitating action. But Hugh had already warned him not to be rash, and under no condition to dream of firing until he himself had given the order.

It was a queer little procession that crept up that steep trail in the gully formed by Nature during the heavy storms of summer and winter. The twin lanterns glimmered and flickered as the night wind puffed the tiny blazes; and ahead of all lay the white glow of the electric hand-torch, showing them how they were now almost at the end of their trail.

Yes, the fissure extended straight into the face

of the cliff. Hugh was taking them directly to the place where undoubtedly the mysterious unknown had stood on a sort of rocky platform, and indulged in all those queer telegraphic code motions with a light of some sort.

CHAPTER XVI

A FRIENDLY GHOST

Hugh led the way straight into the fissure. As they proceeded they could see the light ahead growing stronger. Low sounds, as of voices, also led them onward; and then, upon turning a bend, they came upon a sight that had them all staring with wonder.

It was indeed a cave, and of considerable dimensions. A wild beast would have delighted in such a den in which to hide from the rigors of winter, but to boys accustomed to the luxuries of home life it would doubtless have few attractions, especially after the novelty of camping-out had worn off in a week's time.

It was a fire that burned which gave the light. A pile of dry wood, mostly broken branches of dead trees, showed that the occupant of the cave had laid in a supply against a rainy day.

There, sitting with his back against the wall, was their missing comrade K. K. His face looked unusually white, and bore an expression of acute pain, which, however, he manfully tried from time to time to dismiss by a ghastly grin, alto-

gether assumed, since he certainly was in no mood for laughing.

They could see that his left leg was bandaged in some manner, as though he might have broken the bones, and someone had tried to bind up the limb. Even with that superficial glance Hugh marked the fact that this had been done in a fashion indicating considerable previous experience along such lines.

And then they turned their attention upon the other party, the mysterious one who doubtless had found poor K. K. helpless on the ground and borne him to this cavern in the quarry. He was indeed a wild-looking party, with long, unkempt hair and a sunburnt face in which his glowing eyes were deep-seated. There was that about him to convince Hugh instantly he must be deranged, although just then the man bent over poor K. K. solicitously, and seemed to be tenderly doing something calculated to ease his pain.

Hugh coughed, meaning to draw attention to the fact of their arrival. The man immediately stood up and bent a searching look upon the five lads. Perhaps he had been hearing K. K. tell how some of his chums would certainly be coming to search for him, and, therefore, even though he might wish to remain in his hidden retreat undisturbed, he manifested no hostility toward them, simply folded his arms and, stepping back, watched their approach.

Hugh made gestures to indicate that they were

peacefully disposed. In doing so he purposely used the signal code and spelled out the one word, "friend." He saw the wildman's thin face take on a sudden gleam of awakened interest, and he nodded his head in the affirmative, as if to reassure Hugh that they were not unwelcome. From this the boy knew the stranger must at some time have been in the army, and that even while his brain was resting under a cloud he could still send and receive messages such as had been at one time his daily avocation.

They reached the side of their unfortunate companion. He held out a hand to welcome Hugh.

"Oh! I'm mighty glad you've come, fellows, I can tell you," he told them, with a tremor in his voice. "I've had a rotten time of it all around, and suffered terribly. You see, I made a fool of myself, and tripped over a vine, so that I was thrown into a gully, with my left leg under me. Snapped both bones, he says, just above the ankle, and a fine time I've got ahead of me this winter, with no skating, hockey, or anything worth living for. But then it might have been worse, because my neck is worth more to me than my ankle. But now I do hope you can get me home. I never wanted to see home and mother one-half as much as now."

"Yes, we've come in the big car, K. K.," Hugh assured him. "And we'll fetch you home right away. You ought to be looked after by Doctor Wambold; broken bones are not things to be

trifled with, and while this party seems to have done the best he could it can only be a makeshift."

"Don't you believe it, Hugh," said the injured boy warmly; "why, he's a regular jim-dandy about such jobs. I bet you he used to be an army surgeon in his younger days, from hints he's let drop. And then he knows the Signal Corps work right off the handle to boot, even if—well, I won't say what I meant to. He's been so kind and considerate to me; my own father couldn't have been more tender. I've guessed the secret of the old haunted quarry, Hugh!" which last he almost whispered in the other's ear.

"Yes, I can say the same," muttered Hugh, "because, as soon as I saw that he was using the regular army code of signals, I remembered about hearing how a certain family over near Hackensack had an uncle who used to be in the Signal Corps and was also later on an army surgeon, but who had suffered a sunstroke, and, well, was said to be a bit queer."

"Yes," whispered K. K., "this is the same party. His name, I remember, was Dr. Coursens, and there was some talk last summer about his having got loose from the house and being drowned, they believed, in the river, though his body was never found. Just to think of it, he's been hiding here ever since, picking up his living almost like a wild animal. Why, right now his clothes are nearly falling off his back, and if he

tries to hang out here much longer he'll be frozen to death. But, Hugh, we must let his folks know where he is so they can come after him. I believe his mind is beginning to get a little clear again, for at times he talks quite reasonably."

This was all mighty interesting to Hugh, and he determined that he would let no grass grow under his feet until he had seen to it that the man with the deranged mind was once more restored to his family. But the first thing to be done was to get poor K. K. safely back home.

So he turned to the man and spoke to him, telling him that they wished to get their comrade to the car, and at the same time thanking him warmly for all he had done. Not a single word in reply did Hugh receive. The man listened and nodded his head, as though he could dimly understand what the boy was saying. Evidently he was in something of a dazed condition, if, as K. K. affirmed, his senses were beginning to assume a normal condition after years of darkness.

It was a terrible job getting K. K. down from that elevated place. The man showed them how best to manage. He seemed really solicitous, and it could be seen that he had taken quite a liking to K. K. during their brief intercourse, since the latter had been found groaning on the ground.

Eventually the level below the cliff was attained. Poor K. K. had groaned many times, hard though he fought to repress the sounds, for it was unavoidable that he should receive many

jostlings while being transferred to the lower level.

Then they made their way across the open space, and finally arrived at the waiting car, in which the injured youth was deposited and made as comfortable as the conditions allowed. The deranged man watched all this with a wistful gleam in his eye. He had fled from his kind while still gripped in the darkness of madness, but with the first glimmer of reason being seated once more on its throne he commenced to yearn after human fellowship again.

Since the boys had all taken such a deep-seated interest in the matter it may be proper before the "ghost" of the haunted quarry is dropped altogether from the story to state that the very next morning Hugh went over to Hackensack and electrified the Coursen family with certain remarkable news he brought. It ended in their all starting forth and arriving at the quarry. They found the demented man awaiting their coming as though he had guessed what Hugh had in his mind. More than that he greeted them soberly, and called each member of the family by name, something he had not been able to do since that dark cloud descended upon his mind years back.

There seemed reason to believe that in due time Doctor Coursen might regain his full senses again and spend a few years more with his delighted relatives before the end came.

Hugh, of course, learned all about him and how

he had served years in the army, first as a sergeant in the Signal Corps, and later on becoming a surgeon of considerable reputation before the accident in the tropics deprived him of his reason. Perhaps it had been the utterly helpless condition of poor K. K., when he came accidentally upon the injured boy, that had strongly appealed to the surgical spirit that still lay dormant in the brain and fingers of the insane man and which had been the main cause of the light of reason returning—surgery had been his passion, and the familiar work took him back to other days, apparently.

And that very night, when Doctor Cadmus, hastily summoned to the home of Mrs. Kinkaid, examined the work of the deranged dweller of the quarry cave, he had pronounced it simply marvelous the clever way in which the other had set those bones and put a splint on the leg, with such clumsy means for working at hand. He declared he meant to interest himself deeply in the case and see if such a skillful surgeon might not be restored to the world so much in need of his kind, with the terrible war raging on the other side of the Atlantic.

To conclude with this subject, at last accounts Dr. Coursen had so far recovered as to send in his application for a berth in some hospital over in France, where his wonderful knowledge of surgery might prove useful to the countless wounded men at the front. And doubtless ere this reaches

the eye of the reader he may be across the Atlantic, serving humanity in the great cause.

Long would those five lads remember that strange expedition up to the haunted quarry, and what a remarkable discovery they made after arriving on the ground. It may be that Horatio, yes, and Julius also, would be less apt to clothe anything along a mysterious nature with ghostly attributes, after learning how common-sense and investigation will, in nearly all cases, turn suspicion into ridicule. But while the country folks, of course, also learned how the phantom of the quarry had turned out to be just a crazy man who had escaped from his confinement at home and gone back to primeval ways of living, few of them would ever muster up the courage to visit the deserted quarry after nightfall. It had too many thrilling associations to please them; and besides, what was the use of going out of their way just to feel the "goose-flesh" creep over their bodies when an owl hooted, or some little forest animal gave a grunt?

K. K., being young and healthy, and attended carefully by good old Doctor Cadmus, was not confined to the house for many weeks. The bones did not require resetting, and rapidly knitted, so that after a while he could walk to and from school with the aid of a crutch; and later this, in turn, gave way to a cane. When February came he even threw this aid aside, and by March was seen taking his part in school rushes, as though he had

never been injured at all. But his skates were never once used all winter, nor could he indulge in any sledding, both of which were favorite pleasures with K. K.

On the whole, however, he felt that he had much to be thankful for; and tried not to be too greatly disappointed. But his chums would miss him when the Marathon race was on; because he had been accounted one of the best long-distance runners without exception that Scranton High could boast.

CHAPTER XVII

SCRANTON'S "OPEN-HOUSE" DAY

SATURDAY opened with a promise of fair weather, and thousands of anxious hearts beat high with satisfaction when this important fact became manifest.

Before the morning was half over many strangers were noticed in town, having taken the day off in order to attend the wonderful meet, of which so much had been said. Every boy in Scranton was wild-eyed, and on the run most of the time, trying to be here, there, and in half a dozen places at once, if such a thing were possible.

Indeed, there was so much going on it reminded some people of the famous circus that visited the town two years back, with three separate rings, and something taking place in each at the same time; so that the spectators hardly knew how to take it all in and keep from being cross-eyed.

Out at the athletic grounds there were crowds gathered. Men were working at the fence, while another gang, under the orders of Mr. Leonard, carefully put in place such paraphernalia as would be needed in carrying out the programme. Even

the big pole had been well greased for the climbing match; while the hurdles for the obstacle race were ready to be placed in position at the proper time; and a thousand and one other matters engaged the attention of the physical director, who was probably the most industrious man in seven counties that Saturday A.M.

Nor was that all. Some of the would-be contestants, not wholly satisfied with their record for proficiency, and wishing to key themselves up to top-notch speed against the now near hour of trial, were on the ground, and in their working togs. Here a bunch galloped swiftly around the cinder path, with one of their number holding the watch on them to ascertain what time they made. Further along several other fellows were jumping with might and main, and showing either jubilation or deep chagrin as they found themselves able to do a shade better than ever before, or else going backward in their scoring.

Indeed, that was going to be a red-letter day in the lives of all Scranton's young people. They begrudged the passing minutes, because their period of enjoyment would be shortened just so much with the loss of every sixty seconds.

When Hugh came on the grounds, after his trip to Hackensack, and seeing the hermit of the quarry once more safely lodged in the bosom of his delighted family, he had only one regret. This was the fact that poor K. K., whose heart had been so set on carrying the colors of Scranton

High to victory in the Marathon race, should be debarred from participating in the same by a cruel fate.

As for himself Hugh was not quite so certain as before that he could accomplish such a thing as getting over those fifteen miles ahead of all competitors. What he had gone through with on the preceding day, coupled with his night journey, and only partial rest, after getting in bed at a late hour, had sapped some of his energy.

But Hugh's grit and determination were just as strong as ever, and he meant to do his level best. If he fell down, why, there were "Just" Smith, and Horatio Juggins, as well as two other Scranton fellows, any one of whom might be the winner. So long as the prize fell to a Scranton High boy, it mattered little who carried off the honors, Hugh felt.

Noon came at last.

Everything was now ready for the opening of the athletic tournament. Chief Wambold kept watch and ward over the grounds, assisted by his entire force of uniformed men. He evidently did not intend that any boy, with a mind that turned to practical joking, should have a chance to exercise his evil propensities unchecked. Should such a thing be attempted the joker would find himself up against a snag immediately; and, as those posters announced, he was going to be harshly dealt with up to the "extreme penalty of the law."

There were hundreds of people on the grounds at noon, which was a pretty good marker for the immense crowds that would soon be heading that way from every point of the compass. Most of these "early birds" were, of course, out-of-town folks, farmers' families that had come in, to market, perhaps, and they stayed over to see the great show, because everybody living for many miles around Scranton had heard about the meet, and and what a wonderful sight it would be, well worth going miles to gaze upon. These thrifty and sensible folks had, in many cases, brought their lunch along with them. Perhaps they disliked the idea of eating in small restaurants, such as Scranton, like most towns, boasted; but, no doubt, the main thing was economy in these times of scanty cash and inflated war prices.

It was well worth watching when they started to open their packages, and spread out the contents on the ground or, as might be, on the benches where they had taken up their positions the better to see what went on. And really it would have made any boy's mouth water to note the immense quantities of home-made pies, doughnuts, fried chicken, and all such good things as were displayed in those farmer's wives lunch packets. At least there must be no sign of hard times when the family went on a picnic, or any other sort of pleasure jaunt.

By then the crowds began to assemble in earnest. Town people, fearing a crush, hastened to

leave home with the lunch dishes unwashed, and look for places to sit during the long afternoon. Along the roads every type of car, wagon, carriage, and other styles of equipages began to be seen, all heading toward the center of interest, which was the town of Scranton.

Hundreds came from Allandale; indeed, it might be safe to even say thousands, for in every direction could be seen the colors of Allandale High, just as though each enthusiastic boy and girl had rounded up all their relatives and friends, and induced them to make it a point to travel to the neighboring borough, there to shout and shriek, and in other ways lend encouragement to each Allandale aspirant for athletic honors wherever they showed up.

Belleville, too, must look very much like the "Deserted Village" on this particular afternoon; and, if the amount of business done depended on the few who had remained at home, her merchants would have to stay up until midnight in order to equal their customary Saturday sales.

At half-past twelve the throng had become so dense that Chief Wambold and his men were compelled to enlist the services of a number of willing volunteers who, temporarily decorated with a silver shield, were vested with the authority of regular officers, in order to keep avenues open, and prevent the throng from breaking through the ropes upon the limited field where the athletes expected to compete.

So far as attendance was concerned there was no longer the least doubt but that the meet would prove an abounding success; the rest remained to be proven. But the gathering athletes who began to appear in little knots, coming from the dressing rooms of the building, seemed full of confidence, and answered the loud salutes of a myriad of friends in the crowd with reassuring nods, and gestures calculated to buoy up their hopes.

The programme would be varied. First would come several short sprints between the best runners of hundred-yard distances in the county. These were sure to key up the spectators by their thrilling intensity, as is always the case. Following fast upon these there would be hammer-throwing, and the toss of the discus. Then the programme called for other athletic exhibitions along a line that would lend variety, and enhance the interest, as the different schools struggled for supremacy in the arena provided, spurred on to do their utmost by ringing cheers, and the dearly beloved class songs.

Everybody worth mentioning in Scranton would be there, from Dr. Carmack, the supervising head of the county schools, as well as principal of Scranton High, down the line to the Directors of the Games, the town council, the mayors of the three boroughs, and a whole host of notables besides.

And how the fond eyes of father and mother would follow the movements of John, or Edward,

or Philip, as though he might be the only young athlete worth watching in all that animated scene. If he won, they had always known he did not have an equal in his specialty; and should he be so unlucky as to come in at the heels of the pack, why, it was easy to be seen that he had not been given a square deal by some of the rival runners, who persisted in getting in his way, and were probably leagued together to prevent him from carrying off the prize. But no matter, he would always be a hero in the eyes of those who loved him, though he might not decorate the family mantel at home with the prizes he aspired to win.

Hugh had kept fairly quiet after returning from Hackensack, and seeing the hermit once more safe in the charge of his folks. He knew that he must conserve his strength for the great undertaking that confronted him that afternoon. Those who had entered for the long-distance race would not be allowed, of course, to participate in any other event; that had been laid down as law by Mr. Leonard when they entered their names on the list of candidates. They must simply stand around and watch what was going on until the time came for staging the Marathon; when they could take their place in the long string that would await the pistol shot intended to start them on the telling grind.

Horatio and "Just" Smith were on deck, looking fit and eager. Then, too, there was Nick Lang, with a grin on his heavy face every time he glanced

toward the other three fellows. It was getting on, and some of the earlier events had already been carried through, amidst great roars of applause as the different prizes went, this one to an Allandale fellow, another to a boy wearing the Belleville High colors; and three in succession to local lads.

"I don't exactly like the way that Nick Lang keeps on laughing to himself every time he looks over in this direction," Horatio was saying to the other two.

"I've noticed the same thing," spoke up "Just" Smith; "and it makes me wonder if the tricky fellow hasn't got some slick game up his sleeve, as usual, looking to giving the rest of us trouble. You notice, don't you, boys, that, look as you will, you can't see anything of either that Tip Slavin, or Leon Disney. Now, when fellows who are as fond of outdoor sports as those two have always been, keep shy when such a great event as this meet is being pulled off, there must be a pretty good reason."

"They may be somewhere in the crowd," Hugh went on to say, "because it'd be impossible for any single fellow to identify all that are in that solid heaving yelling mass of people. Nick believes he has a fair chance of leading the pack, and that makes him feel happy. I heard him say only yesterday that the one fellow he was afraid of in our whole bunch was K. K.; and now that accident has eliminated him, why, naturally, Nick

feels more confidence. In imagination he's already receiving the grand Marathon prize, and hearing the crowds yelling themselves hoarse."

"Well," snorted Horatio, gritting his teeth in a way he had when aroused, "if that's what pleases Nick he's got another guess coming; for three of us are also in the game; and he's got to do some mighty tall sprinting in that last half-mile if he expects to win out. Then there are a lot of other fellows in the run who may give him a pain. But, according to the programme, our race comes next after this pole vaulting contest; so, boys, we'd better be moving around, and getting our place in line, according to our several numbers."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREAT MARATHON RACE

It was plainly noticeable how that vast crowd began to stir, and show signs of increased interest when the numerous trim runners entered for the big Marathon started to gather for the preliminary stage of the race.

Each of the many contestants had a large number fastened upon both the front and back of his thin upper garment. By these they might be recognized even at a distance; and many persons carried field or opera glasses of various types just on purpose to make out who each runner was when he came in sight around the bend half a mile away, to open on that last stretch that was likely to see the cruelest work of all, if the competition chanced to be keen.

The boys, as a rule, looked very much like lithe grayhounds, for your natural runner is light of body, and can course along like the wind. Still, this applies more to short-distance sprinters than those whose specialty is endurance in a fifteen- or twenty-mile race.

Several of the fellows were quite muscular in

build, and gave evidence of a grim determination such as the bulldog possesses. These chaps might be easily distanced in the start, but they would keep doggedly on, under the spur of the knowledge contained in that old adage that "the race is not always to the swift."

Hugh Morgan was, perhaps, the best built of them all, neither too heavy, nor yet betraying a weakness that would crop out after the first five miles had been covered, as might be the case with the more slender fellows.

They stood in line, listening to the last words of caution delivered by Mr. Hitchens, a former Yale man who had umpired the baseball games the preceding summer in such an impartial manner that everyone had the utmost reliance on his fairness.

He explained to them the simple conditions of the race,—how there must be no fouling of any kind; just how often and where the contestants must register their names in books kept by judges on the course; how each was supposed to give his word of honor not to accept any sort of lift for even a dozen feet; and that the great crowd assembled would be waiting to acclaim the first-comer as the victor in the greatest long-distance race ever attempted by high-school boys, at least in that particular county.

They were allowed a certain latitude as to their methods of running. If any of them could cut across lots, and still cover the entire course, as

well as register faithfully wherever required, that was to be their option.

Having finished his little fatherly talk, the referee stepped to one side, and gave the word for the runners to make ready.

Every eye was glued on this or that contestant, according to the humor of the spectator. Each Allandale visitor saw only Allandale in that long line, swaying back and forth a trifle, like a reed shaken in the wind. They could not believe it possible that any other fellow had the slightest chance of coming in ahead of those fleet-footed boys upon whose ability they pinned their full trust.

So it was with the Belleville rooters; while, of course, the natives were certain the prize was already as good as won by Hugh Morgan; or, it might happen to be, Horatio Juggins, "Just" Smith, or possibly Nick Lang, the last-named looking ever so confident, as he leaned over nearly double in his favorite crouch, his fingertips in contact with the ground, and his knees bent.

Then came the sharp report of the pistol.

"They're off!" involuntarily exclaimed a thousand persons in unison, as the line of nimble runners was seen to leap into action, and shoot away with amazing speed.

There were a few little lively brushes in the start, before the runners settled down to real business. Some were immediately left behind, but this

fact seemed to give them little concern, for they kept jogging away as though quite happy.

Doubtless, a number had entered with no idea of covering more than a few miles of the long course. They just enjoyed the excitement, and the honor of being able to say they had once run in a fifteen-mile schoolboy Marathon race.

After a bit these novices would drop out, perhaps even hasten back with various clever excuses for giving up; and having gained the cheers of their particular coterie of friends they could don a few more clothes to keep off the chill, and settle back to watch the rest of the entertainment. Their opinion would naturally be much sought after, as to the chances of this or that genuine contestant; which was one of the things they desired.

As it takes considerable time for even fleet-footed runners to go over a fifteen-mile course, the sensible committee, who knew just about how long the crowd would have to wait, had provided plenty of amusement meanwhile.

Interspersed with a number of minor events, such as further sprinting matches for younger entries, and some more pole vaulting, as well as Indian club exhibitions of skill, would come the humorous features of the meet.

These are always popular with the country people; indeed, nearly everybody seems to welcome them as a diversion calculated to raise hearty laughter.

There was also keen competition even in the

potato race; and the crowd yelled itself hoarse to see the antics of those who met with all manner of mishaps when engaged in the hurdle, and the obstacle affairs.

The boys who had engaged to try for these prizes seemed to "get their dander up," as some fellow expressed it, and the way they struggled and vied with one another was "equal to a circus with a brass band."

Although mention may not have been made of the fact up to now, the Scranton band was giving of its very best from time to time, and the air throbbed with martial music suitable to a country just then at war with a foreign nation. It was a fair sort of band in the bargain, and well worth listening to; so that the music really added greatly to the enjoyment of the occasion.

When the three-legged race was pulled off the spectators howled their sympathy with this or that pair of contestants as they hopped along, now rolling on the ground while bound together, and, at times, even trying to creep in desperation, when it seemed as though a difference of opinions in the two minds trying to control what was just the same as one pair of legs, caused confusion, and a lack of progression.

Later on came the climbing of the greased pole. This is always comical enough, and aroused much enthusiasm. Nobody seems to be a favorite, and each successful attempt to mount is greeted with shrieks of laughter. So long as a valiant fellow

is seen to be steadily making his way upwards, inch by inch, he may be applauded; but let him display the slightest hint of having "shot his bolt," and begin to slip back again, howls of derision will greet his ears, so that in confusion he finally gives it up, and retires in haste.

All sorts of small means are resorted to in order to allow the contestant to get a surer grip on the slippery pole; for, up to a certain point, these are allowable. One rubs sand in his hands, and for a brief time this seems to enable him to do splendid work; but then it soon wears away, and then his troubles begin; until, unable to make further progress, he is seen to glance over his shoulder to note how far from the ground he has risen. This is a sure sign of weakening, and, of course, the watchful crowd again roars at him to keep right on, that he's doing nobly, and all that; but John knows better, and so down he comes with a rush, and passes out, shaking his head in disgust and bitter disappointment; for possibly he had been within five feet of the top when his energies failed him.

So the time went on, merrily enough.

Many persons were declaring they had not enjoyed such an afternoon for years, and felt weak from so much laughter.

Watches were being consulted more and more frequently now.

"It's getting time we saw something of those chaps," could be heard here and there, showing

that numbers had figured things out, or else received a tip from an authority in the game as to just how long it was likely to take a fleet runner to cover fifteen miles of good road.

Anxious eyes were being strained unduly, watching the bend half a mile beyond. It could be seen from almost any part of the field, fortunately, though once the big board fence was in position, the view would be partly cut off.

It had been arranged, as is always done, that when a runner was sighted nearing the bend a gun would be fired by the sentry on duty there, to attract the attention of the crowd, so that they might have the first glimpse of the leading contestants, as they rounded that abrupt curve where the view was shut off.

There was now nothing going on in the arena, the entire programme having been carried out. Still, few, if any, left their seats, although they had been there for several hours, it might be. The deepest interest centered upon the completion of the Marathon race. In comparison to this exhibition of school-boy endurance and pluck the other affairs seemed to sink into insignificance; although at the time they occurred doubtless those who had friends entered were wildly excited. But then the race that has already been finished is never as intensely interesting as the one in process of being run; just as the fish landed never seems quite so wonderful as the fellow who is still

swimming the waters, and eyeing the baited hook as though tempted to take a hazard.

Seconds seemed fraught with undue importance, and many impatient fellows, upon consulting their watches, were seen to hold the same up to their ear, as though to make sure the time-piece had not stopped, so leaden-footed did the minutes seem to move along.

Some of the girls had commenced to sing their class songs, but in a mild sort of way; for they did not wish to lose the sound that would denote that a runner was in sight at the second bend, and could be expected shortly to come into view at the head of the last half-mile strip of road leading to the goal.

Once an engine on the railroad not far away gave a sharp whistle that thrilled everybody, and numberless eyes were glued on the point up the road where the first runner must appear. Then a general laugh ran around because of the false alarm.

But everything must have an end, and that keen anxiety finally met with its reward. Plainly came the heavy boom of the waiting gun. Everyone craned his or her neck to see. Hearts beat quicker with eager anticipation. Which one of the thirty contestants would be the first to appear? There might be several in a bunch, primed for the final sprint for goal. The very thought thrilled hearts, and added color to cheeks, as well as made eyes sparkle with anticipation. Allandale was not

cheering now; Belleville rooters were strangely quiet; for, so far, the outcome of the great race was still wrapped in mystery; but the solution would soon come, they knew.

Another heavy boom told that a second runner was just around the bend, and when a third discharge quickly followed the crowd knew there was going to be an exciting finish to the Marathon.

Then a plainly audible sigh broke forth as the first runner was seen rounding the bend, and starting on the home stretch, but wabbling badly as he ran, being almost completely exhausted.

CHAPTER XIX

ON THE FINAL MILE OF THE COURSE

MEANWHILE, in order to understand certain important events that came about, it is necessary that we follow the runners, and devote this chapter to what occurred up to the time that first fellow came lunging around the final bend, having covered the whole course up to the final lap.

For a mile or so along the road there were bunches of schoolboys and girls waiting to give some of the contestants a cheering word as they flashed past. The enthusiasts, however, would not linger long, for they likely enough wished to see the comical part of the programme carried out. Besides, once the runners had straggled past their posts the only interest remaining for them in the race was its conclusion. So they would want to get back to the grounds, and secure positions along the line to the first bend, where they could greet each contestant as he appeared, and cheer him on; for he would probably need encouragement, being near the point of exhaustion.

Hugh had figured things out exactly, and knew what he could do. He was not alarmed because

several of the visiting runners led the way, and even "Just" Smith had quite a little lead over him.

Pegging along, Hugh covered mile after mile with a steadiness that he had reduced to machine-like motion. He had timed himself, and the whole course was mentally charted for his guidance. If he reached the cut-off road at a certain time he would know things were moving just as swiftly as necessary. Those boys who strained themselves in that first seven miles would be apt to rue their rashness when they began to feel their legs quiver with weakness under them, and still miles remained to be covered ere the goal came in sight. And, besides, they were sure to be in no condition for a hot final sprint, in case of keen competition.

So Hugh, having registered as required at two booths on the way, and thus learned the order in which the trio ahead of him seemed to be running, finally arrived at the sunken quarry road. He recognized the landmarks before he reached the spot; and losing not a second of time darted among the trees.

"Just" Smith was still leading him, for here and there he could distinguish the other's foot-prints, where the ground chanced to be a little moist. Hugh also had reason to believe that Nick Lang was coming strong not a great distance behind him. He wondered whether Nick meant to take advantage of the old quarry road as well as

he and "Just" Smith, and Horatio in the bargain. For that matter Hugh did not care an iota; if Nick considered it would be to his advantage he was at liberty to benefit by this scheme of Hugh's. It was all for the glory of Scranton High; and far better that Nick won the prize, than that it should be taken by an Allandale, or a Belleville contestant—that is, if he won it honestly.

Apparently, on the face of the returns, when half of the fifteen-mile course had been run, the victory was likely to be carried off by Whipple, the fleet-winged Allandale chap who had played right field during the baseball matches; "Just" Smith; himself; or possibly Nick Lang. There was always a dim and remote possibility, however, of a dark horse forging to the front on the home stretch. This might be Horatio Juggins, or McKee, or perhaps that Belleville runner, Conway, who had looked so confident when Hugh surveyed the line of eager faces at the start.

Hugh remembered every foot of the way along that quarry road. He had a faculty for impressing features of the surrounding landscape on his mind, so that he could recall it at pleasure, just as though he held a photograph in his hand.

Now he was drawing near the quarry itself, the loneliest and most gruesome stretch of the entire cut-off; with "Just" Smith still in the lead. Hugh felt proud of his chum, and often chuckled as he contemplated the other's supreme delight in case a fickle fortune allowed him to come in ahead; for

honors of this sort were a rare thing in the past of the Smith boy; and certainly he had never before been so close to reaping such a colossal prize as the winning of the Marathon would be reckoned.

Now Hugh glimpsed the quarry on one side of him. How his thoughts flew backward to marshal the strange events so recently happening there, in which he and some of his comrades had had the good fortune to participate.

Just then he heard a plain groan. It gave him a little thrill, but not because he fancied there was anything supernatural connected with the sound. Looking in the direction from whence the groan came he discovered a boy sitting on the ground, and rubbing his lower extremities vigorously.

It was "Just" Smith! Evidently something not down on the programme had happened to the boy who led the race across the quarry road. Hugh suspected treachery immediately. He turned aside, and sprang towards his chum.

"Hey! what ails you, 'Just' Smith?" he called out, wasting some of his precious breath in the bargain. "This isn't the way to win a Marathon, don't you know? What if you have barked your shin?—forget all about it, and get moving again!"

The Smith boy looked very sad, as he shook his face dolefully.

"Huh! wish I could, Hugh," he hastened to mumble, still rubbing his shin, and making faces as though it hurt him considerably. "I've tried to

run, but shucks; what's the use when you can hardly limp at the best? I'm through, Hugh, sorry to say. You keep on, and bag the prize; next to winning it myself I'd love to know *you* took it away from that Whipple chap."

"But—how did the accident happen, 'Just' Smith?" continued Hugh.

"Accident nothing!" snapped the other, between his set teeth. "It was all a set-up game to knock one of us out of the race, I tell you. If you'd been leading at the time, why, that shower of rocks must have met you."

"Rocks, did you say?" exclaimed Hugh, looking dark.

Just then the sound of footsteps was heard. A runner went past them on the full tear. It was Nick Lang, and when he turned his face toward the two on their knees the wicked look on his grinning face told more eloquently than words how his brain had been the one to hatch up this miserable trick whereby he hoped to gain an advantage over one of his schoolmates who might happen to be leading him in the race. He vanished down the road, still running strong. "Just" Smith almost howled, he was so furious.

"That's the chap who engineered this rotten game, I tell you, Hugh!" he snapped. "And chances are ten to one it was Leon Disney and that Tip Slavin who threw all those stones, and then ran away laughing, so I couldn't glimpse 'em. Say, I was struck in half a dozen places. I've got

a lump on my head nearly as big as a hen's egg; and my elbow hurts like everything. I was so flustered that I must have got twisted in a vine, or else struck a root, for I fell, and barked my shin something fierce. I wanted to chase after the cowards, but knew it was silly to think of such a thing. Then I tried to keep on, but it wasn't any use, and I gave it up as a bad job. But Hugh, I hope you don't mean to let that skunk profit by his trickery. Please start off, and beat him out, if it takes a leg."

"But I hate to leave you here, 'Just' Smith, much as I'd like to chase after Nick, because now he deserves to be beaten."

"Oh! don't bother about me, Hugh. I'll try and get to the main road, even if I have to *crawl.* Later on you can come back for me in some sort of rig. Whew! but I'm as mad as a hatter because I've lost my fine chance, when I was going so strong, with plenty of reserve force held back."

Hugh realized that duty called upon him to do as his chum demanded. It would be a shame if Nick Lang actually profited through such a rank act of treachery toward his fellows of Scranton High. An individual should be ready to sacrifice his school or its interests to his own personal ambition, and certainly never should it be allowed that he gain his ends through such a dastardly trick as the waylaying of another on the road, and his being assaulted, as "Just" Smith had been.

"All right, I'll do it, then!" Hugh exclaimed,

with a look of sudden determination. "Expect me back later on, old fellow! Bye-bye! Don't try to do too much, and hurt yourself worse!"

With these words he sprang away. "Just" Smith gave him a parting cheer, that must have come a bit hard, owing to the pain he suffered, and also the bitter disappointment that wrung his boyish and ambitious heart.

Hugh had but one thought now, which was to speed along at such a clip as to allow him to finally overtake and pass the treacherous Nick, and leave him in the lurch. The spur of punishing the other for such dastardly conduct was apt to prove an incentive calculated to add considerably to Hugh's running.

Nick had the advantage, since he must be well on the way to the main thoroughfare by now; and once that was gained there was a clear field ahead of him. But one more registering station remained, and that was at a certain turn on the way home. Then would come the final three miles, with the pace increasing constantly, as those in the lead vied with each other to get ahead, or to retain that proud position.

Hugh quickly regained the mastery over his aroused feelings. He must stay cool and collected so as to do exactly the right thing at the right time. A little slip in the way of judgment was likely to lose him the race, for he now learned as he gained the main road, that there were not only one but two competitors ahead of him.

Yes, the fleet-footed Whipple had somehow managed to spin along over the ground, and was now not far behind Nick Lang. Possibly the fellow from Allandale had also secretly examined the course and discovered a cut-off on his own account, through means of which he anticipated gaining a great advantage over all the other runners in the Marathon.

Hugh now set out to make steady gains. He must be within a certain distance of those two fellows by the time the last stretch was reached, or else all his hope of overtaking and passing them would be lost.

He found that his powers of endurance and speed had not been misjudged, for they responded nobly when called upon for a further spurt. Now, he was greatly lessening the distance separating him from Whipple; who, in turn, seemed able to hold his own with Nick.

The latter began to show the first signs of distress when they were at the beginning of the last two miles. He looked over his shoulder, and no runner ever is guilty of such an unwise proceeding unless his heart has commenced to be filled with grave doubts as to his being a winner.

Again did Hugh notice Nick doing this, and he took fresh courage from the circumstance. Yes, and looking more closely he also saw that Nick was not running true to form any longer; he had begun to wobble more or less, as though unable to continue on in a straight line. That was an-

other bad sign, since it causes the runner to cover unnecessary ground; and also indicates a weakening heart.

Hugh let out another burst of speed. He was closing the gap rapidly; and, apparently, Whipple also seemed to be gaining on the almost played-out Nick.

They were now within less than a mile of the finish; the last turn would soon be reached, with the gun booming out the fact of their arrival. Hugh girded his loins for a Garrison finish, and gloried in the conviction that he was in trim to do himself credit.

CHAPTER XX

THE BOY WHO WON—CONCLUSION

"It's Nick Lang, as sure as anything!" shouted a boy who happened to possess an excellent pair of field-glasses.

"Nick Lang in the lead!" howled another; "well, what do you think of that? Where, oh, where, oh, where is Hugh Morgan about this time; and 'Just' Smth in the bargain?"

"But Nick is a Scranton High boy after all, and that's a heap better than to see an Allandale fellow come in ahead!" cried another near by.

"Look! a second runner has turned the bend; and see how he is coming up on poor wobbly old Nick hand-over-fist!"

"Hello! what's this mean?" whooped a visitor exultantly. "Surely I know the second fellow's build. It's certainly our great Whipple! He's going to cop the prize, boys! Give Whipple an Allandale yell right now to encourage him!"

Even as a score of boyish throats roared in response to this entreaty a third runner was discovered rounding the bend. He appeared to be tearing along at race-horse speed, as though having

a reserve stock of power upon which to call in this closing half-mile of the long race.

"Hugh Morgan!"

The words seemed to run like wildfire through the vast crowd. Everybody repeated them, some with a growing delight, others with a sense of impending disaster to the wild hopes they had been so ardently cherishing; all according to the viewpoint they held. Scranton's register was rising, while Allandale visitors began to feel something was on the verge of happening to crush the budding pæan of victory that was ready to bubble from their lips.

Nick evidently knew that he had shot his bolt. He, doubtless, tried frantically to encourage his legs to move faster, but they refused to hearken to the call. Whipple was now rapidly closing the short gap existing between them. At the same time it could be seen that the Allandale runner veered a trifle, as though to give Nick a fairly wide berth when passing.

Plenty of fellows noticed this fact, nor did they wonder at it. The tricky character of Nick Lang was pretty well known, and they believed he would not hesitate about throwing himself sideways, so as to collide with Whipple when the other was in the act of passing him; although such a vindictive act could, of course, not better the position of the local runner a particle.

When Whipple actually took the lead a great roar arose from thousands of throats. Doubt-

less many wild-eyed Allandale enthusiasts already counted the victory as won. They could be seen commencing to throw their hats and caps into the air, boy-fashion. Others, wiser, gripped their hands, and held their breath while waiting to see the actual finish of the great race.

Of a truth Whipple was doing splendidly, there was no gainsaying that; but coming on back of him was one who appeared to be making much better time. Hugh was gaining fast, they could see. The only question that remained to be settled was whether Whipple had it in him to increase his pace sufficiently to cross the tape first; or, on the other hand, if Hugh Morgan was able to speed up still more, and close the gap.

How the shouts rang out. Everybody seemed to be cheering madly at the same time. Men stood up, and waved their arms; girls embraced each other, though not an eye was turned away from that wonderful finish of the great Marathon race.

Now, Hugh had apparently released his final effort. He was gaining faster and faster. Whipple seemed to know that he was in deadly peril. He, too, looked back over his shoulder in alarm, possibly meaning in desperation to almost burst a bloodvessel if he found that his rival was about to overtake him.

That proved his eventual undoing, though the result was no longer in doubt. He lost his balance, and, being so exhausted that he could not stand longer, pitched headlong to the ground, just as

the fleet Hugh jumped into the lead, raced twenty steps further, broke the extended tape, and thus won the race.

How the heavens seemed to fairly quiver with the roars that broke out! It had been a most thrilling finish for the greatest race ever run in all the country. Time might come and time might go, but never would those who had been so fortunate as to witness the conclusion of the Marathon forget the thrilling spectacle.

Hugh bore his honors meekly.

He utterly declined to let some of the Scranton fellows pick him up and bear him around on their shoulders, as they threatened to do. After the prizes had been duly awarded the assemblage broke up, and the roads leading out of Scranton were soon blocked with hundreds of vehicles of every description carrying home the visitors.

Even Allandale and Belleville had no reason to be disappointed over the general results, for their young athletes had fared very well, all things considered. Of course, most of them would rather have seen the Marathon won by a representative from their school than to "scoop in" all the other prizes grouped together; but since it had to go to Scranton, they voiced the opinion of most people when they declared they were glad Hugh Morgan had won it, and not Nick Lang.

Even though overwhelmed with congratulations on every hand, Hugh did not forget his promise to "Just" Smith. As soon as he could get into his

street clothes he hunted a fellow who chanced to have his father's flivver handy, and easily won his consent to take him along the road in the direction of Belleville, in order to find poor "Just" Smith, and get him home again.

This they did without any mishap, and it may be easily understood that the disappointed boy hailed their coming with great joy. He knew all about that gruelling finish of the big race in the bargain, some of those Allandale chaps passing by in vehicles having readily informed him as to the winner, and what a tremendously thrilling sight the finish had been.

Of course, since "Just" Smith had not once glimpsed the figures of his assailants, and as conviction can hardly rest upon a burst of vindictive boyish laughter, there was no public denunciation of Nick Lang and his cronies. Everybody could give a good guess, however, as to who was guilty; and after that Nick was destined to feel himself more ostracized by his schoolmates than ever before.

The great athletic tournament had proven to be a complete success, being marred by no serious accidents, for which many a devoted mother in Scranton gave thanks that same night, even though her boy may not have won undying fame through gaining a prize. Hugh himself was more than satisfied, though he would have been almost as well pleased had it been poor "K. K.," "Just" Smith, or Horatio Juggins who had won the big

race, so long as the honor of Scranton High was upheld.

That was to be the finish of the fall sports, but with winter so near at hand, and that vast field being put in order for flooding, it might readily be guessed the boys and girls of Scranton were in line for considerable more fun while Jack Frost held sway over his frozen dominions. That this supposition proved to be a correct one may be judged from the title of the fourth and following volume in this series, which can be had wherever boys' books are sold, and bearing the suggestive title of "The Chums of Scranton High at Ice Hockey; or, A Wizard on Steel Runners." Get it, if you have enjoyed reading about Hugh Morgan and his loyal comrades in this and previous books; you will find it just as deeply interesting as anything that has gone before, since the boys of Scranton enter upon a fresh line of healthy competition, this time upon the ice.

THE END

THE DICK HAMILTON SERIES

BY HOWARD R. GARIS

A NEW LINE OF CLEVER TALES FOR BOYS

DICK HAMILTON'S FORTUNE

Or The Stirring Doings of a Millionaire's Son

Dick, the son of a millionaire, has a fortune left to him by his mother. But before he can touch the bulk of this money it is stipulated in his mother's will that he must do certain things, in order to prove that he is worthy of possessing such a fortune. The doings of Dick and his chums make the liveliest kind of reading.

DICK HAMILTON'S CADET DAYS

Or The Handicap of a Millionaire's Son

The hero, a very rich young man, is sent to a military academy to make his way without the use of money. A fine picture of life at an up-to-date military academy is given, with target shooting, broad-sword exercise, trick riding, sham battles, and all. Dick proves himself a hero in the best sense of the word.

DICK HAMILTON'S STEAM YACHT

Or A Young Millionaire and the Kidnappers

A series of adventures while yachting in which our hero's wealth plays a part. Dick is marooned on an island, recovers his yacht and foils the kidnappers. The wrong young man is spirited away, Dick gives chase and there is a surprising rescue at sea.

DICK HAMILTON'S AIRSHIP

Or A Young Millionaire in the Clouds

This new book is just brimming over with hair-raising adventures of Dick Hamilton in his new airship.

DICK HAMILTON'S TOURING CAR

Or A Young Millionaire's Race for Fortune

A series of thrilling adventures. Dick and his friends see the country in a huge touring car. Their exciting trip across the country, how they saved a young man's fortune and other exciting incidents are very cleverly told.

DICK HAMILTON'S FOOTBALL TEAM

Or A Young Millionaire on the Gridiron

A thrilling story of how Dick made a real football team for his school—the team that was laughed at by other military schools until Dick took charge.